

# Why Fax Machines Won't Die in Healthcare

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In an article that likens the fax machine to “the cockroach of American medicine,” Vox explores why, in the midst of the tech revolution, healthcare organizations are still relying on the antiquated fax machine to exchange medical records. Their conclusion is clear—health record systems are not interoperable, and healthcare providers and vendors are not incentivized to fix it.

Titled “The Fax of Life,” the article by Sarah Kliff provides an easy-to-follow summary of how healthcare ended up with electronic health record (EHR) systems that exchange records through a “Rube Goldberg-esque analog method for sharing data” involving printing off pages of one record, faxing it to another provider, and then scanning those faxed pages into the other digital system.

Interviews with former heads of the Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT David Blumenthal and Farzad Mostashari break down how the HITECH Act and its \$30 billion “meaningful use” EHR Incentive Program caused EHR adoption to explode while not requiring those systems to easily exchange health information.

“We don’t expect Amazon and Walmart to share background on their customers, but we do expect competing hospital systems to do so,” says Blumenthal, the first National Coordinator for Health IT from 2011 to 2013, in the article. “Those institutions consider that data proprietary and an important business asset. We should never have expected it to occur naturally, that these organizations would readily adopt information exchange.”

Blumenthal’s successor, Mostashari, says the reliance on fax machines has become so ingrained in healthcare that potentially the only way to stop it—and get EHR systems to become interoperable—would be the federal government banning the use of fax machines to exchange health information.

“I think if we want to kill the fax, we need to schedule a funeral,” Mostashari says in the article.

While likely not news to health information management professionals, the article does a great job explaining and simplifying the very complex issue of interoperability and healthcare’s lack thereof. Read the full article at [www.vox.com/health-care/2017/10/30/16228054/american-medical-system-fax-machines-why](https://www.vox.com/health-care/2017/10/30/16228054/american-medical-system-fax-machines-why).

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