

The “perfect marriage”: how document imaging enables electronic records



Paper is a fact of life.

Even once everyone is using the new integrated clinical information system, currently being developed as part of the Clinical & Systems Transformation project, we will be ‘paper-light’, not paperless. Some clinical documentation (such as Code Blue documents) will still be on paper; and paper documents will continue to arrive from outside VCH, PHSA and PHC. That’s where document imaging, or scanning, comes in.

“The imaged record marries up with the electronic record so you don’t have a hybrid record,” explains Sylvia Melnyk, manager of CST’s Health Information Management/Document Imaging Team.

“It’s called ‘the perfect marriage’, and is considered best practice for health information management. Ultimately, this means clinicians can just go to one place to find the information they need.

“The model includes scanning all clinical documentation received in paper format and some non-clinical documentation, for example third party requests for patient information.”

Document imaging will be done centrally by the Health Information Management department for inpatient, daycare and emergency records, with documents from ambulatory settings being scanned at the point of service. Records from residential sites and existing, historical paper records will not be scanned as part of this project.

Forms Management

To make paper documentation easier to manage, the team is also working on forms management. “You will be able to print an internal paper-based document with barcodes already on it, so that when the patient is discharged and the form needs to be scanned, the barcode is already there,” clarifies Sylvia. “This means we won’t have to manually process the documents and add the barcodes afterwards. Barcodes are important because they identify patient information and document type, which determines where a document will be housed in the system.”

Document imaging has clear benefits for patient care and reduces costs for storage and retrieval of records. “We’re re-engineering our business processes to reduce storage and decrease response times to requests for information,” confirms Sylvia.

Background information

The Clinical & Systems Transformation project is a joint initiative of three health organizations: Vancouver Coastal Health, Provincial Health Services Authority and Providence Health Care. The project is designed to transform health care delivery systems and processes to improve the safety, quality and consistency of the patient and caregiver experience. CST will support the health organizations in establishing common clinical and process standards, including work flows, order sets, clinical guidelines integrated plans of care and a common electronic health record. This clinical transformation will be supported by the implementation of a clinical information system that will replace aging existing systems. The project will be implemented in stages across the health organizations.

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