# Navigating the shift from physical to digital documentation in healthcare

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Hospitals and other healthcare facilities are preparing for a transition toward digital record-keeping systems. With many medical documents and processes still relying on physical record-keeping, there's a need for digitisation solutions that streamline and facilitate the journey.

# The state of healthcare documentation

Despite electronic health records (EHRs) dating back a few decades, many healthcare providers are still reliant on paper-based medical record-keeping. Even now that over 90% of Australians have a digital My Health Record in their name, almost half don't contain any information. Paper documents still include:

- Mental health paperwork (mandated by regulation). As outlined by the State-Wide Standardised Clinical Documentation for Mental Health Services policy enacted in August 2021
- ICU forms and IV order forms
- Outpatient attendances
- Prescriptions
- Diagnostic reports
- Correspondence between hospital staff and specialists
- Bookings and consent forms

Recently introduced standards, as well as many long-standing healthcare documents, still follow a paper-first protocol.

## Paper-based records vs. digital medical records

The push for digitisation of paper documents has many benefits for today's healthcare providers. Handwritten paper records could be illegible, which may lead to errors in care such as misdiagnosis. They may not be readily accessible in moments when they're needed or emergency care is required. Likewise, they're difficult to protect outside of physical storage and may not produce an audit trail. Even when digitised, paper records may not be scanned right away – thus causing a discrepancy between one data source and another.
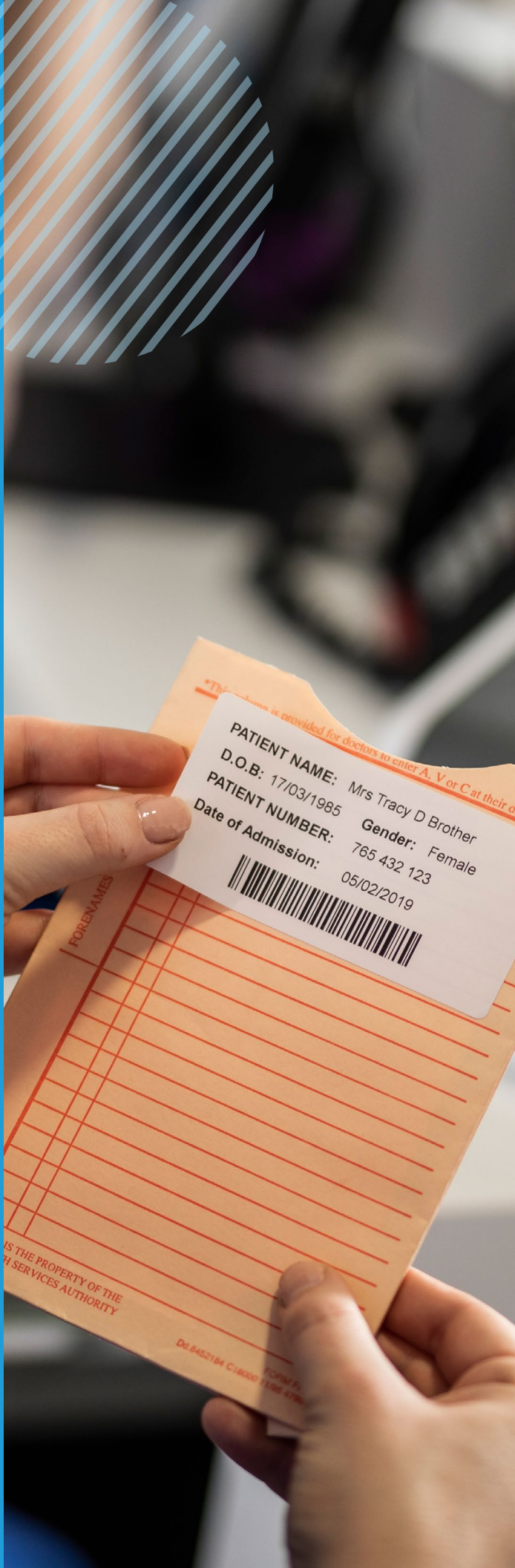
Digital records increase transparency, mobility and accessibility, thus also increasing the quality of care provided to patients. By providing a single source of truth, providers can find all of the detailed and necessary information in one centralised location. They can be tracked using a digital version to ensure patient confidentiality.

# The ideal document management workflow

There are a number of tools, solutions and technologies needed to streamline and support the transition from paper-based to digital record-keeping. Here are some of the more prevalent methods today's healthcare professionals are utilising to effectively manage their digital workflow.

**FILING**

The Australian Government Department of Health has outlined administrative record-keeping guidelines for health professionals. The guideline suggests having a comprehensive administrative record-keeping policy so that all employees understand their responsibilities in relation to record-keeping, adhere to the standards they operate by and can achieve and maintain this standard. Adherence to these guidelines means keeping detailed records and patient information.

Over time, the on-premises storage needed to archive these critical healthcare documents has grown, impacting the footprint allocated to storage and the speed with which the right documents can be found.

Devices compatible with electronic health record (EHR) software systems can shift filing methods from paper to digital. Many of today's leading technologies can be integrated with Cerner Corporation applications, which bolsters security for patient record access, scanning and printing while ensuring compliance with the latest industry regulations.

Adopting a digital filing system will also reduce the on-floor, physical storage needed to house old paper records and increase the efficiency of today's healthcare providers.

**SCANNING**

As outlined by the National Safety and Health Quality Service (NSQHS) Standards, documentation of patient records is required to be legible, concise, simultaneous, progressive and accurate. In order to align their old paper documents – some of which contain barely legible handwriting and cursive records – many healthcare providers are recognising the need to create digital records.

Traditionally, when a patient checks into a healthcare facility, administrative staff pull a file containing a detailed medical history – including a record of previous doctor's

appointments and test results. Upon beginning their consultation, the medical professional is able to thumb through the pages in order to gain the necessary insight that is relevant to the conversation.

High-speed scanners and multi-function centres (MFCs) connected to hospital networks provide doctors simplified, one-button access to scan and archive workflows that ensure forms are immediately captured and stored in the correct digital location. This allows cross-departmental visibility and quick access to documents and data when they need them.

The benefits of scanning technologies in the healthcare industry are many. The smooth integration between physical documents and increasingly important digital resources allows accurate and up-to-date information to be stored and retrieved quickly. This speed could be critical in order to make better care decisions.

The increased efficiency provided by digital record-keeping allows personnel to accomplish more tasks in less time.

## QR CODE SCANNING

QR codes provide the opportunity to store large amounts of data in an electronic format. Once in place, QR codes can be used for tracking office inventory, linking online assets and assisting patients with their personal health records.

This saves time spent searching through filing cabinets or requesting electronic copies of records from other healthcare providers that could negatively impact the patient care process.

Today's QR code technology can store over 7,000 characters, leaving room for patient history, medical records and other critical data.

## DATA CAPTURE

Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software helps reduce human errors associated with the high-pressure environments of healthcare organisations. OCR-enabled devices analyse the text of a page before turning it into code that can be used to process information. OCR technology makes thousands of comparisons before creating a final 'translated' document – one with extremely high accuracy levels.

Considering the precision necessary for patient medical records – from medication dosages to previous history – this accuracy is of paramount importance to healthcare providers. OCR-enabled scanners that store records digitally can overcome the challenges created by human error, from typos to misfiled or lost documents.

Once converted to an electronic format, the recognised text can be processed, classified and exchanged easily. The integration of patient data to a digital platform allows for coordination of upcoming appointments, as well as insight into billing information and charting history.

## DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT

An effective document and content management solution ensures that a digital workflow encompasses the scanning, managing and sharing of business documents. Document management accelerates the healthcare operational process while providing enhanced security standards for critical data and documents.

As outlined by Action 1.16, the Australian government states that healthcare records must be available to clinicians at the point of care, and providers must integrate multiple information systems. Document management platforms assist in compliance by providing clear visibility to a centralised cloud-based infrastructure.

The secure password and cloud encryption capabilities of a document management solution ensure that medical records, health information and other pertinent data is protected from unwanted access. Traditional paper records could be lost, damaged or destroyed – cloud storage guarantees that a digital copy of valuable information is readily available to anyone who provides the correct authentication algorithm.

An end-to-end document management system affords the transition of all paper records to digital documents and workable PDF copies. Scanners and MFCs integrated with document management software can easily digitise large volumes of records, increasing the visibility of critical data for hybrid and remote workers.

The secure cloud offers increased productivity for any medical professional seeking access, as the need to chase down old paper records and documents is replaced by the ability to view information from authenticated devices anywhere in the world.

**PRINT MANAGEMENT**

Print management services like PaperCut simplify and streamline administrative processes. The easy and agile deployment of a print management process reduces healthcare bottlenecks by re-tasking a print job to connected devices in the event of an overburdened asset. The cloud and mobility printing capabilities ensure medical professionals can print documents from anywhere in the facility, increasing efficiency in the need of a fast solution. IT administrators and management can also enjoy increased visibility on print protocols thanks to reports and dashboard data regarding their print assets.

Healthcare businesses can cut costs by setting printing quotas and policies that aid in the reduction of paper and consumable use – efforts that also align with sustainability goals.

# How Brother can help

As the healthcare field moves towards a digital direction, the continued use of paper documents in departments such as billing has resulted in a need for strategic deployments of portable scanners, laser printers and MFCs.

Brother's *at your side* philosophy promises to deliver products and solutions the healthcare industry can rely on to achieve its goals. Brother partners in providing cutting-edge solutions tailored to the ever-evolving needs of today's patients.

By equipping healthcare professionals with customised digital documentation devices, platforms and strategies, Brother is aiding the digital transformation necessary to ensure an efficient, secure future for today's critical patient systems.

To learn how we can enhance the functionality of your healthcare business infrastructure, contact us today.

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