

**WHITE PAPER**

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## **Despite Distractions**

Medical Practices Are Keeping Things Simple

Presented by  
Janine Akers, Director of Business Development

# Despite Distractions

## Medical Practices Are Keeping Things Simple

While the rest of the country is distracted by a plethora of healthcare topics making headlines, medical professionals are keeping their eyes on the ball with a few simple, but important priorities: patients and profitability.

Every night, news channels show an endless stream of coverage about healthcare reform proposals along with expert opinions. Interestingly, the debate is fueled almost entirely by those that have little to do with patient care or maintaining a financially viable medical practice. Regardless of what is being covered in the media, today's healthcare professionals are doing their best to strike a balance between comprehensive patient services and streamlined business operations in order to thrive.

So what are some of the keys to maintaining sanity and profitability in a medical practice?

"Knowing what you're good at and focusing on your areas of strength – I'd say that is absolutely number one," said Dr. Thomas D. Kelley III, Family Medicine. "When we stopped trying to do everything ourselves and instead figured out cost effective ways to get things done from an operational perspective, we became more efficient and much more satisfied with the business side of running a medical practice."

One such area is managing the workflow surrounding medical records and the cumbersome Release of Information process. An ever-present challenge for doctors' offices is maintaining an efficient, HIPAA compliant workflow with patient records that are both current and accessible without burying personnel in time-consuming and labor intensive maintenance tasks. Not only is the updating and handling process a burden on staff resources, but also HIPAA considerations and lack of responsiveness to patient requests can take its toll on overall patient satisfaction.

### Being Prepared for Compliance Changes Before They Occur

As healthcare providers know and intimately understand, keeping a laser-like focus on cost-effective operations has become increasingly difficult with the changes mandated in the healthcare portion of the Stimulus Package, HITECH Act. A Business Associate is now regulated under HIPAA the same as a Covered Entity. In layman's term, this change means an outsourced vendor carries the same responsibilities as a physician under HIPAA. Business Associate agreements will need to be updated to reflect the changes. Additionally, the HITECH Act requires an audit trail of disclosures upon a patient request which can be difficult to provide if records are not meticulously maintained. Another change requires that, should a patient or other requestor of medical records request an electronic copy of a medical record (versus a paper copy), a Covered Entity must produce such records electronically if the requested paper record is stored electronically. Details on the above changes can be found at <http://www.hhs.gov> and <http://www.himss.org>.

### Does In-house Release of Information Still Make Sense?

Staying on top of the requests for medical records is a continuous undertaking.

Many physicians choose to handle this process internally. While the in-house solution used to make sense from a logistical perspective, especially if the office is rural, it is not without a few serious challenges. First and foremost, in-house staff will literally spend hundreds of hours in the

### Juggling too many responsibilities?



...why make electronic release of information one of them



## Despite Distractions, Medical Practices Are Keeping Things Simple

workflow tasks associated with the Release of Information process. From answering phone calls, analyzing requests, ensuring compliant forms, invoicing, tracking payments, printing the records, mailing, faxing, burning the records to CD...etc full-time and knowledgeable personnel are crucial to keep up with the requests. In tight times when physicians are looking for every cost-savings possible to help their practice survive, they may be considering cutting back on office staff. Yet fewer staff equals a longer lag to fulfill patient requests. This delay could potentially cost physicians dearly in terms of their patient-base and referrals.

Another consideration is the importance of HIPAA compliance. In-house personnel need to be trained on the latest rules and regulations which is practically a full-time job itself. The most alert and keen eye can easily miss a potential HIPAA violation associated with a request. At a minimum, ensure your office workflow for the Release of Information includes (2) sets of eyes to analyze the signed release and the records being distributed. *If you have subscribed to the mindset since converting to an EMR that the Release of Information process is "just a click of a button," it is highly recommended that you consider an internal audit to analyze the potential burden this brings to your practice.*

### Why Look Externally? What's the Big Deal?

As a way to move out of the all-consuming internal workflow model, many practices have focused on using an outsourced copy service solution. Copy service solutions can certainly help address the problems of resource management, like finding enough personnel to manage the workflow. However, this type of outsourcing is not without some important considerations such as timeliness, data security, scalability and HIPAA compliance.

As healthcare providers know, timely responses to patient requests for their records or information are crucial to maintaining a happy patient/physician relationship. With an outsourced copy service, an organization may find that their service contract is limited to specific days of the week, much like a milkman or laundry delivery service. In this model, a patient or healthcare provider may have to wait an inordinate amount of time for the copy service to fulfill a request. Clearly this scenario can have a very negative impact on patient satisfaction.

Additionally, as medical organizations continue to grow, it is crucial they ensure their outsourced solution is able to keep pace. If the outsourced copy service has limited capacity for growth, due to limited capital resources, infrastructure capacity, or staff, the customer organization could be held in check by the same limitations.

Another potentially greater concern for healthcare organizations is the rise in medical identity theft. The last time federal data on this crime was collected in 2007, more than 250,000 Americans were victims of medical identity theft annually. This number is projected to have increased substantially over the last two years making it a growing problem. Medical practices thinking of hiring a temp service or unscreened employee beware.

Finally, HIPAA compliance is a major concern when considering an outsourced copy solution. In order to comply with the latest regulations and privacy legislation, an outsourced copy provider must be current on the rules. If an outsourced provider has a low employee retention rate, an organization may be in violation without knowing it.

### Why Outsource with DataFile?

DataFile Technologies specializes in working with practices that have converted to an EMR environment and has developed smart solutions for streamlined records fulfillment. In fact, DataFile eROI solves the lengthy lag time for record requests by processing all new requests on a daily basis.

**What's the key to maintaining sanity and profitability in a medical practice...**

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- Dr. Thomas D. Kelley III,  
Family Medicine



Analyze your ROI workflow

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Rather than waiting for a copy service to make an on-site visit and or leaving it to an in-house staff member to prioritize this mundane task over all the items in the triage pile, clients have the benefit of daily fulfillment from DataFile leading to happier patients and increased customer satisfaction ratings.

DataFile eROI was developed to grow with an organization's needs because it is, by its very design, an on-demand and online platform. Security concerns are reduced substantially because records are no longer physically transported off-site and four (4) sets of eyes analyze and review every release before distribution. Patient records are transferred from a client's EMR system to DataFile's SAS70 certified data center. With the data center's mission-critical redundancies, firewalls and back-up systems, a DataFile client can also be assured their very important patient records are securely stored and protected.

DataFile also closely monitors the latest changes from HIPAA compliance and record-keeping to patient privacy. Armed with the technology to provide detailed records of every transaction, clients can be assured that they are fully covered with the latest best practice IT security measures stipulated in the HITECH Act. DataFile is dedicated to offering rock-solid customer service to address any and all of their clients' needs. Their team has over 100 years of combined experience in ROI and medical record processing, and they are proud of their employee retention tradition.

"Deciding to outsource with DataFile was a really smart business decision for my practice," said Dr. Thomas D. Kelley, Family Medicine. "Their solution has enabled my office staff to manage their workflow successfully which allows them to focus the most important thing—providing excellent patient customer service and support."

DataFile Technologies is a preferred vendor with e-MDs and shares their commitment to excellence and dedication to staying abreast of the latest compliance regulations. DataFile's solutions and processes are so streamlined that many new clients are up and running within 24 hours! Please contact DataFile today to free up your staff and transfer this burden. You can learn more about how their solutions can benefit your practice by visiting <http://datafiletechnologies.com/eMDs-webinar.html> to sign up for a free educational webinar.



**DataFile Technologies**  
1625 Oak Suite 230  
Kansas City, MO 64108

816.437.9134  
DataFileTechnologies.com  
info@datafiletechnologies.com

**Hire an entire team for less than a part time employee.**

**About DataFile Technologies:** DataFile is your healthcare technology partner that offers strategic solutions to Free up your staff, Free up your time and Free up your space. We offer a superior medical record fulfillment process, a proven EMR implementation scanning service and a host of document management solutions.