What's New in the Patient Safety World

January 2019

Still Faxing?

Our January 16, 2018 Patient Safety Tip of the Week "Just the Fax, Ma'am" discussed in detail the hazards associated with faxing and provided numerous recommendations for steps you should take if your practice, facility, hospital, or organization continues to communicate via fax.

But there is clearly a move afoot to abolish use of faxes in hospitals. The National Health Service (UK) has banned buying fax machines and expects a complete phase-out of fax machines by April 2020 (gov.uk 2018). And there are questions about Canada following suit (Picard 2018a),(Picard 2018b).

Now the US may finally be considering action.

Recent statistics from the ONC (Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology) (Johnson 2018) show that about seven in 10 hospitals sent (66 percent) or received (73 percent) summary of care records using mail or fax in 2017.

Moreover, there is a gap between urban and rural hospitals, and big and small hospitals. Small, rural, and CAH's (critical access hospitals) were three times as likely to send summary of care records using only non-electronic methods, and about twice as likely to receive summary of care records using only non-electronic methods compared to their counterparts. Small, rural, and CAHs were about half as likely to send and receive summary of care records using only electronic methods compared to their counterparts.

In a recent speech (Verma 2018), CMS Administrator Seema Verma said "If I could challenge the developers in this room here today to achieve one mission, it would be this: help us make every doctor's office in America a fax free zone by 2020!"

Verma said "health care providers are in a 1990's time warp…where doctors are faxing patient records, medical staff are manually entering results into EHRs, and hospitals are handing out data on a CD-ROM while the rest of the economy is functioning on fully digitized, integrated data that informs decision-making instantaneously".

We hope your practice, facility, hospital, or organization is already planning for a phase-out of faxing. But, in the meantime, we hope you'll go back to our January 16, 2018 Patient Safety Tip of the Week "Just the Fax, Ma'am" and make sure you are addressing the vulnerabilities associated with use of faxing.

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