

## DATA BACKUP. WHY DO WE BACKUP OUR DATA?

The focus of this article is not technology and the backup process. Most practices have the necessary technology and some sort of backup process in place. However most practices go through the motions of backup without a clear understanding of the ramifications of their actions.

When conducting IT Risk Management assessments, the common theme amongst most practices is the heavy reliance on their IT provider for most information including their backup strategy. This is very surprising, as the value of any medical practice is in the patient data, therefore most practices need to have systems (IT and Human Processors) implemented to protect their data. More importantly, it is these internal human processors that will retrieve their data in case of an emergency, after all this is why we backup in the first place.

I can understand the reliance for all technical matters and support, however the practice must have a detailed understanding of their internal backup strategy/recovery procedure and any possible shortcomings. In this regard the question that needs to be asked "How accountable is your IT Providers if your data is lost or destroyed as a result of their action?" What checks and balances do you have? As a minimum, ensure your IT provider has PI cover and ask to see a copy of this. I guess the theme of the above is to find a balance between external expertise and having someone internally who understands the basics. We love it when we have a practice manager who develops IT Savvy skills over time and questions the intricacies of our work.

The business needs to understand what data is important to the business, what data is being backed up, where it is being saved and some proof it has been backed up. From there you can build an effective backup and recovery model. When asked this question during an IT Risk Management Assessment, most users make plenty of assumptions or simply do not know. This guess work often includes patient data, practice management data, administration files and accounting files - a little unnerving considering the obvious negative ramifications.

The main purpose of performing any backup is being able to restore your data in case of an emergency. It is therefore critical to have a well understood recovery mechanism implemented and tested. Although very basic but effective, the easiest strategy is to have at least the data tapes/CD test restored on a monthly basis, to verify the data can be recovered in case of an emergency. This should be performed by either your service provider or by an internal staff member with a process to monitor what data and storage media has been restored. (The data that should be tested is the one that is located offsite on a permanent location.

Any practice must have an effective media rotation policy. (One tape for each trading day for a two week period). There must be at least one tape offsite at any point of time, day or evening. The most effective strategy is to have a fireproof safe onsite and have at least one tape in a safety deposit box or Post Office. It is important to limit the "hand bag strategy!". The media rotation policy must be clearly understood by all parties concerned. In addition, the practice must a daily backup log to verify who performed the last backup worked the following day. Some backup applications (Non Generic) email you daily if the backup has been successful. If you are using a tape drive, ensure you are cleaning your drive every week.

Always remember the backup process is dynamic and needs to constantly tested and updated.

### In Summary

- Understand what data is being backed up.
- Understand where the data is located.
- How can the data be retrieved and restored in case of an emergency.
- Have an internal process to constantly verify the above.
- Understand what data is important to the business.
- What data can be retrieved in case of an emergency?

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