

The Evolution of Medical Information Management

From the IBM Selectric to the Now Integrated Online Program

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The management of medical information for litigation has changed dramatically. While the objectives and core work products upon which critical decisions are made remain the same, the efficiency by which the data is assimilated and managed, and the mechanism of delivering the work products have evolved — from the Dictaphone 25 years ago, to today's software-as-a-service (SaaS) via Web.

The Dictaphone and Typewriter

The Dictaphone of the late 1970s made preparing summaries time consuming. The process started with dictating each record into the recorder and then replaying the information in order to transcribe an all-encompassing summary. If at any time information needed to be changed or added to the summary, however, the entire document had to be retyped, using an IBM Selectric typewriter, from start to finish.

The typewriter was eventually replaced by the word processor — and, in the late 80s, early 90s, the desktop computer. Relational databases then emerged, used primarily to prepare medical chronologies, although sorting data had its limitations. Manual intervention was often required to deliver a user-friendly work product.

Over the next few years, as caseloads increased, relational databases became more robust...and accessible in the client-server environment, allowing for the manipulation of data in a variety of ways without the need for major programming.



Databases and the Internet

In 2000, the Internet catapulted the business of medical-information management in litigation to a new level; while the business model remained the same, the process became more efficient and cost effective.

Clients could now be provided with centralized, secure, and up-to-date information through electronic product delivery. Users were assured 24/7 access to any work product hyperlinked to supporting documents,

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standard and ad hoc reports; a vehicle to communicate among counsel and staff; full business continuity; and the guarantee of a fully secure application that is compliant with HIPAA and client requirements.

Features, managed internally by the service provider's staff, are comprehensive...

- View all records (sorted by source or document type) and related analysis via hyperlinks
- View work products via split-screen functionality
- Download all work products and underlying documents (separately or linked)
- Sort and view case information by plaintiff, by counsel, or by other parameter
- Access and update information regarding record acquisition(s)

With the success of Web-based delivery, industry leaders like Litigation Management, Inc. (LMI) took the next step...integrated online programs for individual use.

The Alternative Program

While some attorneys, law firms, and corporate legal departments can justify outsourcing medical-information management services, others cannot. As a result, easy-to-use online tools are making noise.

Dubbed "software-as-a-service" or SaaS, systems like LMI's SmartCase.com enable users to:

- Work from any location with an Internet connection;
- Enter data once and use it for multiple purposes;
- Update work products as additional records are received;
- Access medical-decision support tools from one point;
- Minimize or eliminate paper;
- Brand the firm through all work products and product delivery vehicle;
- Communicate to clients/team members with one click;
- Deliver work products through a secure Web site;



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As healthcare facilities move to the Electronic Health Record, users of health information, including the legal community, need to be prepared to work exclusively in an electronic environment.

- Ensure that data and work products are secure and fully protected from disaster; and
 - Perform any function without costly computer equipment updates or consulting IT.
- There is no need for software installations or performance upgrades. All data is stored securely.



Same Objectives, Same Outcomes

No matter the program, the objectives and outcomes — work products — remain the same, and have since the days of the Dictaphone.

The effective acquisition, analysis, and summarization of medical information allows counsel to focus on high-level activities, such as evaluating the medical-record findings, monitoring trends, and developing strategy, as opposed to reviewing the actual medical records and collecting data.

If the data requirements are anticipated early and managed correctly, one review of records should provide all of the information needed for the functions of discovery, trial preparation, settlement, monitoring of trends, forecasting and reporting. All of these factors should be considered, as there is a great deal of data to be “mined” from the records, and that information can be used in a number of ways to support a case.

Finding the Right Program

Consider an outside service provider, and receive work products via electronic delivery, or bring the service in-house with a subscriber-based online system that your staff can manage. No matter which you choose, however, the program should meet the following criteria.

Flexibility: Crucial to efficiency. Records often arrive in piece meal manner, making it necessary to backtrack and update the plaintiff’s chronology with newly received information, and to ensure readers know what

information is new since it was last viewed.

Accessibility: Immediate access to information is critical — making a Web-based environment “best.” As healthcare facilities move to the Electronic Health Record, users of health information, including the legal community, need to be prepared to work exclusively in an electronic environment. Web-based applications allow for efficient sharing of information and collaboration.

Portability: Document images and work products need to be at your disposal when in a deposition or trial situation. Providing access via the Internet assures that you have the most current data.

Security: Critical, not just from the standpoint of HIPAA, but also with clients, co-counsel, and staff. Consider the assignment of specific staff members or subcontractors to specific cases while not providing access to the entire database, or sending copies of records to an expert, but not allowing access to the attorney work product.

Elizabeth B. Juliano is president of Litigation Management, Inc. (LMI), a company she founded in 1984. LMI provides defendant corporations, insurers, and their counsel medical information management services for litigation that involves some medical aspect, particularly mass tort product liability litigation.

Juliano recently expanded on LMI’s business with partner company and integrated online program, www.SmartCase.com.

