

Softwords

A&L Computer Software Limited

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...Contents...



The Future Is Now
Why Update? Why Not!

...Page 1



Efficient Handling Of Patient Records
Don Price

...Page 2



User's Corner:
Computer Emergencies and Transmission Problems

...Page 3



S'port for Kids Ball

...Page 4

The Future Is Now Why Update? Why Not!

Technological changes in the medical industry are simply a part of life. Sometimes it's due to security concerns and other times it's to upgrade the current situation. But security consists of many things. When an employee leaves the company, are locks and security codes changed? User names and passwords? These issues must be acted on and dealt with immediately. The situation has nothing to do with existing hardware or software. The hardware and software would work just fine if no changes had occurred with the employment status. If disgruntled employees leave, are they taking personal or valuable information with them that should be left in the office? With the advent of the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act, otherwise known as the PIPEDA, greater care must be taken to secure information from leaking into the public domain.

Public domain can be a two way street which can also be accessed through your computer if you have access to the Internet. As most of you know, "www", stands for "World Wide Web". You can surf the web and look for just about any information you wish. However, an astute computer "intruder" can send out signals, similar to sonar, and if they get signals back, that's a hint that somebody out there may not be properly protected. This "intruder" may then try a number of ways to force their way into your computer and see what's available. That's why there are a number of companies producing security software and peripheral hardware. Anti-virus "Suite" programs may now include firewalls and other protection like spam filters, incoming/outgoing e-mail scans and script blocking. As technology forges ahead, everyone will get caught up in its crest and be forced to move along, especially if one of the leaders, like Microsoft, moves forward. Working in conjunction with other leaders in the software and hard-

ware industry, companies are constantly looking to improve their products. Security with Microsoft is paramount.

Many home computers with Internet are constantly being monitored for upgrades for much of the software installed. Then there are programs that try to protect you from intruders, hackers and viruses which have to be updated regularly to protect you and your valuable information. Microsoft is one of the companies trying to protect you with constant patches and service packs that plug small holes within the operating system. Developers and administrators, whose systems have already been compromised, are usually the ones that find the problem and are kind enough to notify Microsoft and share the information. It serves both parties to find a solution, as it benefits both greatly.

In some cases, introduction of new technology may require the removal of older technology where there is no link or cross over between the two. Some things that come to mind are backup and compression utilities and network/communication protocols in Microsoft. In addition, once these items are updated or removed, they will no longer be supported. For example, Microsoft no longer supports Windows 95 or NT. In addition, sometime in the near future, Microsoft will discontinue support for Windows 98. One of the key issues here is that Microsoft has removed and/or tweaked some network 'languages' such that they may no longer work at all or may require some reworking to make Windows XP communicate properly. Microsoft's most recent security patch, referred to as Service Pack 2 (SP2), has been found to conflict with some programs, rendering them unusable or at best unstable. The unfortunate part is that sometimes these problems are unknown until the software is used in the field.

(continued on page 2)

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Efficient Handling Of Patient Records

By Don Price, B.Sc., M.B.A.

This is one of a series of articles by Don Price on Practice Management which have been appearing in recent issues of **Softwords**. Don Price, B.Sc., M.B.A., is a Practice Management Consultant based in Ottawa, Ontario. He travels extensively throughout Canada helping physicians and their staff tune up and revitalize their offices through consultations and seminars. In addition, Mr. Price publishes workbooks and two bi-monthly newsletters for physicians and medical office staff. He can be reached at 1-800-458-1900 or fax (888) 339-5975.



The efficient handling of patient records within a medical office can have far-reaching effects on many areas of the practice, including telephone management and physician and staff management.

Few medical offices in Canada are entirely paperless, although numbers are growing annually, so it is still the majority of offices that need to tighten up their record management systems.

Many years ago, I was called into an office to help improve staff telephone management. The office received numerous complaints from callers who constantly reached busy signals, or were put on hold for anywhere up to 10 or 12 minutes. Several patients transferred to other doctors because they found it impossible to get through to the office to make appointments. Other patients became no-shows when they couldn't get through to cancel an appointment.

On interviewing the staff and observing what was happening at the front desk, I realized that the main culprit here was a badly managed record system rather than poor telephone management. Charts were often not where they should be – in the filing system. Completed charts sat in piles in the reception area waiting to be filed. Doctors took charts home with them to write progress notes, or left them in any one of a dozen different places within the office. Thus, when a phone call generated the need to find information from a chart, the phone lines were tied up as the staff put the caller on hold to search for the chart.

Staff spent an unacceptable portion of each day hunting for charts when they should have been completing other work, and doctors' time was wasted as they often had to delay returning telephone calls – or even seeing patients – until a chart had been found. General inefficiency pervaded every area of office productivity, and in nearly every instance this could be traced back at some level to poor chart management.

I always recommend that no chart should be out of the system for more than twenty-four hours whether they have been completed or not. Physicians should get into the habit of writing or dictating their progress notes at the end of each patient visit. Not only does this help get the chart back into the system, but it takes a lot less time to write notes when the information is still fresh than it does to write notes after seeing dozens of patients.

Doctors should never remove a chart from the office to complete at home without a proper tracking system in place to ensure that the whereabouts of the chart are known to staff.

Staff, too, must take their share of responsibility for ensur-

ing charts are where they should be – in the filing system – and abide by the 'twenty-four hour rule' to return them. If the chart isn't completed at the end of the day (e.g. an insurance form or medical/legal letter is needed) the chart should still be returned to its proper place on the shelf or in the cabinet, with a log kept up to date of work that has yet to be done.

I have visited hundred of offices over the past 25 years as a Practice Management Consultant and unfortunately have found that there are still far too many physicians and staff who don't afford the proper degree of importance to their charts and filing systems.

Patient charts should be considered the heart of a practice, and without a high level of efficiency in this area overall office productivity suffers, and doctors are unable to provide consistently excellent patient care. +

(This article first appeared in *The Practice Manager*, a newsletter published by Don Price & Associates.)

Why Update? Why Not! (Continued from page 1)

Microsoft has received calls from upset users but there are usually caveats in the licensing agreements indicating that Microsoft takes no responsibility for the performance or effects it may have on other programs. Most people tend not to read licensing agreements, which are usually wordy and complicated.

However, Microsoft usually does a good job in implementing upgrades and patches without affecting other software programs. As a result no one notices these things until something goes wrong. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't upgrade periodically. Microsoft cannot afford to drop its guard. Better to have a little inconvenience trying to make your programs work than to have private records leaking through your hands. +



Update Regularly

Users Corner

Break Glass And Pull Lever In The Event Of An Emergency


We've all seen fire alarms that ask you to break the glass and pull the lever. But what do you do in a computer emergency? That would depend on what went wrong and what things you need to get back on track as soon as possible. In this scenario one would set into motion a contingency plan, if you have one. The contingency plan is dependent on whether you took time during good times to have something to fall back on. In this article we will discuss the plans you need to have in place for emergency situations.

Let us take a step back. The only way you can have a contingency plan is if you have the proper equipment and take the time to use. What is the proper equipment? Did you know, MOHLTC technical staff suggests that you have a 3.5" floppy drives in your new computer even if you submit claims via EDT? Nowadays, computer manufacturers are removing certain devices like 3.5" floppy drives and conventional modems, replacing them with different types of drives and connection devices. This will continue to happen as the industry researches and develops new components and peripherals that are more efficient. Nevertheless, whether you use the technology or not it's strongly recommended you have it. Since MOHLTC stipulates the medium and path for you to submit your claims, it's always good to start with them to determine your minimum requirements. You can then speak with a computer professional to see what else is recommended. The backup process is a great example. Some people have chosen to use an automated tape backup and, depending on the level of technology in your office, this may be best suited to you. However, if your computer is a few years old and the backup device is designed to work on older operating systems, you may not be able to use or take the technology forward if you have a crash or have to replace your hardware. What do you do if the manufacturer doesn't produce that product anymore or if the manufacturer is no longer in business? What do you do if the device doesn't work with your new operating system? Of course, if everything works, then you are in luck. If not, you will have no benefits to show from your contingency plan. As technology rolls on and our dependency on the equipment grows, we tend to take things for granted. We rely on modems and phone lines, believing they will always work, that upgrading hardware or software will not affect anything in our existing set up, that our computer will work trouble free for many years (not withstanding user error), and that our staff will always be there to do the little things that need to be done. But that one instance when things don't go our way can certainly be a huge inconvenience.

To help yourself you must provide your own safety net. Software and hardware companies can only help you if you have taken the proper precautions, so please be sure you have the following:

1. 3.5" floppy drives and disks.

2. Daily backups to work with.

By ensure that your existing office technology can be used with today's current technology market you will be in a better position to overcome emergencies. 

Ever Have Problems Transmitting Or Connecting To EDT?

From time to time, A&L receives calls regarding transmission problems. Depending on the type of hardware and/or operating system you have, you may be able to get a specific error code and description of the problem.

The most common cause of error is a busy line or a line in use. Subsequently you get a message saying 'testing connection' or 'no dial tone.' Some operating systems and modems will dial again without any problem. On the other hand, some don't move beyond the 'testing connection,' message at all. The reasons why some computers are unable to dial out or seem to be stuck are very simple. Modems can be set for a number of different scenarios. There are settings for adjusting re-dial attempts, time between re-dial attempts, and idle time before hanging up. Chances are that your "idle time before hanging up" is set higher than it should be. If you have many doctors in a clinic, or if you work in another clinic using the same program, the program may be comparing your files in the mailbox to files in the computer, thus making it think it is idle and hanging up before any transfer of files can take place.

If you are not familiar with what the setting should be, there are a few options. One is to simply wait until the problem sorts itself out. Even better, if you have an external modem, simply power down the modem and power it up again. A&L can walk you through how to close the program. Windows XP and 2000 will usually allow you to do this. Pressing the Ctrl, Alt and Del keys to go through task manager, ending the task on the offending program and then re-booting your computer usually does the trick. Going through this step is the most desirable way to get you moving again. Ideally, you should try to allow Windows to shut down properly (earlier versions may not do this). The goal here is to re-set your modem.

The 'no dial tone' message is quite common. Your office could be sending or receiving a fax, the line might be in use by someone, or your cord has become disconnected. Again, reaching a solution is the same as described above. Try not to go for the 'power off. Pressing the power button and not closing the computer properly can lead to damaged files in the allocation table, or cause cross-linked or lost files. In non-technical terms, your files may not be there when you go looking for them. On start up, your computer should run Scan disk on it's own. Allow it to run completely. This should off-set the possibility of lost files but is not always foolproof.





S'port For Kids
Foundation

S'PORT FOR KIDS BALL 2005

This year's S'port for Kids Benefit Gala is fast approaching! The event date is Saturday May 14TH, 2005 at the Sheridan Parkway Toronto North Hotel located at 600 Highway 7 E in Richmond Hill, ON., just west of Hwy 404. The event promises to be bigger and better with dinner, live entertainment and coverage from our local news outlets. Pauline Chan will once again be our host for this wonderful event. We will be joined by such luminaries as honorary chair George Chuvalo and Paul Henderson. This year's key note speaker will be 1972 Summit Series hero, Paul Henderson. Entertainment will be provided by Juno Award winning band The Good Brothers. Please join us for this great cause and help give underprivileged children a sporting chance!

ORDER FORM

Please reserve ___ ticket(s) @ \$175.00 per person \$ _____
Please reserve ___ table(s) @ \$2,000.00 per table (10) \$ _____

I am **unable** to attend but wish to contribute \$ _____

I would like to donate the following item (s) for auction

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2 _____

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Reservations are limited and will be accepted in order of receipt.

Please enclose your cheque or money order with this order form and mail to:

S'port For Kids Foundation

175 West Beaver Creek Road, Unit 6, Richmond Hill, ON L4B 3M1

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