



**Unified Approach to Sharing All Images  
and Records to Streamline  
Continuity of Care**



*Integrated Oncology Consulting Solutions  
And Cancer Care Center Planning*

## Unified Approach to Sharing All Images and Records to Streamline Continuity of Care

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*The Oncology Group strives to bring new programs of interest to our clients and provide information from companies that could be of great value to your facility. As mentioned in the article below, the issue of record retrieval can be a challenging and daunting task. eHealth Technology provides services to connect the healthcare continuum to ensure that any medical record and diagnostic-quality image is available when and where it is needed. For more information on eHealth Technology or The Oncology Group services, [send us an email](#) or call 512.583.8815.*

Continuity of care, especially for patients that are transferred between organizations, suffers from the lack of any organized, efficient methodology of collecting and forwarding the required records and diagnostic images required for treatment. Healthcare participants have been struggling with these problems for many years, and despite all of the digital technology and social media that connects us as individuals, our healthcare system remains broken. We desperately need a single, unified solution that will assure timely arrival of records and images to the caregivers that are responsible for the patient's treatment.

The limited ability to share all of a person's medical history can at best be inconvenient, and at worst tragic. One of the major motivations behind the federal government's Meaningful Use initiatives is to make the process of sharing medical records and images much more streamlined and unified. According to a report in September of 2012 by The Institute of Medicine of the National Academies, 20 percent of patients reported that their medical records and images never arrived at the provider with whom they had an appointment, and 25 percent of patients said that their physicians re-ordered tests to assure accurate information for a diagnosis. Not only does this alarmingly routine practice add cost to the US healthcare system and its patients, it is inconvenient to the patient to have new testing done, and the unnecessary radiation exposure from additional radiology procedures is just bad patient care.

There have been many advances in Electronic Medical Record (EMR) systems that improve care within a single facility, but huge gaps remain when transitions of care occur between facilities, as medical records are usually missing and a unified view of the patient's medical history is seldom achieved.

One approach is to rely on the patient to do the work. However...with this approach

- an anxious and sick patient is burdened with tracking down their medical records
- which often leads to further difficulties for the staff as they attempt to fulfill patient requests for information that are confusing and incomplete
- too much of the wrong information arrives far too late

Another approach is to rely on staff members at the treatment facility...with this approach

- they have to request the required records and images from all of the patient's caregivers, one location at a time, by phone or fax
- when responses are inevitably delayed or ignored, calls must be made a second or a third time
- they generally have many other core responsibilities and therefore find it difficult to keep up with and manage the process effectively, resulting in further delays

Another approach is to have a Health Information Exchanges (HIE) make records and images readily accessible. However, this approach works only for those providers and physicians that are connected to the Exchange, and some record types are still not managed effectively by HIEs—in particular, medical images. Therefore, most HIEs are not entirely the answer either.

Furthermore, the conventional solution to getting images from outside providers is to copy the images and associated reports to a portable media type like a CD. However,

- the process of locating images in the PACS and creating the CD is labor-intensive
- relying on the patient to be the courier places an unfair burden on someone with already major burdens to deal with
- CDs are often un-readable or incompatible

Some facilities have attempted to solve these inefficiencies by subscribing to a Cloud-based electronic image exchange service. However,

- the provider may not deliver the relevant images to the Cloud in a prompt manner
- it is difficult to reconcile many additional viewing platforms with each provider's choice of a Cloud-based service, and the service may only support Windows platforms
- the provider may neglect to include the report along with the images
- the intended recipient may forget his or her password to the provider's service

In the end, the challenge remains: the treating physician still cannot be assured timely record and image delivery, and as a result must wait sometimes weeks before they receive all of the records and images they need to be able to schedule the patient's first appointment. For a cancer patient, this additional two or three week wait might even be the difference between life and death, let alone more unnecessary anxious waiting.

This brings us to an ideal solution for obtaining external records and images. The goal is to achieve a Unified Approach to obtaining and sharing all relevant records and images., to meet all of the following goals:

- The electronic transfer of records and images from all sources in a timely manner.
- Organize all of the records and get them into the appropriate EMR system.
- Forward all of the images to the appropriate PACS or VNA.
- Develop and enable efficient manual processes for records that are not in an electronic format.
- Image-enable each of the EMRs deployed across the enterprise and image-enable the HIEs to which the organization belongs (which supports Meaningful Use).
- Connect all of the EMRs across the organization to all department PACS.
- Establish a methodology for timely communications with both the internal and external referring physicians.
- Enable all caregivers with access to the complete patient record, including images and EMR records.

This may appear to be a daunting challenge, but there is an approach that I believe can meet all of these goals. There is an approach that is, in fact, the combination of a single unified technology platform and a set of professional services. It successfully connects the healthcare continuum across all enterprises, health information exchanges, providers, and others so that any external medical record and diagnostic-quality image is available when and where it is needed. Referrals are streamlined, with communication between parties largely automated—keeping caregivers connected during healthcare transitions. To learn more about this service and the other services The Oncology Group provides, please contact us at [info@theoncologygroup.com](mailto:info@theoncologygroup.com) or give us a call at 512.583.8815.