

**Business Continuity:
The Heart that Keeps Data Pumping Through a Healthcare Institution**

Business continuity: saving lives in the healthcare industry

In the healthcare industry, “code reds” don’t only occur in the emergency room. Healthcare IT professionals carry a heavy weight on their shoulders when it comes to protecting and managing patient information as it transitions into digital form. If this information is lost or stolen, healthcare organizations will be forced to pay a heavy price in penalties, and possibly—because the data is so vital—lives. In order to protect and manage the data properly, and simultaneously comply with government regulations, healthcare organizations need to implement an effective business continuity plan.

Business continuity involves the implementation of data and network infrastructure solutions that allow an organization’s operations to continue undisturbed even in times of distress. This can range from natural disasters or power failures, to network outages or hacker attacks. If a patient is admitted to a hospital in critical condition, access to their health records is needed immediately, despite any disturbances.

Beyond patient care, healthcare organizations are a place of business. In order for the business to function efficiently, the network must be able to handle the immediacy of the industry and its regulations—the most important of these being the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). HIPAA requires healthcare organizations and professionals to maintain confidentiality, security, and availability of all digitized patient information. Penalties for not complying with HIPAA can be severe, including fines up to \$1.5 million and possible jail time.

Clogging network arteries prevents business continuity

Surprisingly, one of the challenges facing the healthcare industry when it comes to implementing a business continuity plan is lack of awareness. This is typically more common with smaller entities such as private medical practices. Often, these organizations don’t have dedicated IT staff, or the necessary technical knowledge to understand the network capabilities needed to sustain a business continuity plan. Many of these entities also lack the funding necessary to support the cost of implementing a business continuity plan. This lack of awareness keeps small healthcare entities from realizing the vulnerabilities that exist on their networks.

However, some healthcare professionals are well aware of the regulatory requirements forcing the move to Electronic Health Records (EHR). They just choose not to comply. This attitude of resistance isn’t uncommon, and a great deal of education is needed to help these professionals see otherwise.

Effective business continuity keeps data safe as it pumps through the network

Business continuity has been slow to take hold because it's a newer concept in the healthcare industry. Even if you're familiar with business continuity plans and how they work, they're still difficult to implement. There's no one "cure-all" solution. An effective business continuity plan requires a suite of solutions that properly address the existing vulnerabilities on a network. This will ensure that if there's a disruption on the network, the solutions in place will work together to keep the network running properly.

For example, data storage is vital to business continuity, especially in the healthcare industry. Before, patient medical records were stored on paper in filing cabinets. With the switch to EHR, this information is now digital and requires network technology to enable proper storage, retrieval, and protection of the data. The reality is that most small healthcare entities don't have the proper network infrastructure to handle this influx of digital data. Therefore, outsourced, offsite data storage solutions are often a vital component to healthcare business continuity plans. These storage solutions are able to back up data on a network and store it on a magnetic disc, which allows for faster retrieval and recovery of the data, should a healthcare entity's network go down.

How PAETEC can help build an effective business continuity plan

PAETEC provides the solutions that are necessary to mitigate the risk involved when it comes to ensuring continued and immediate access to the immense amount of digital data associated with EHR. For example, PAETEC will perform a network assessment free-of-charge that helps healthcare organizations understand how their network is structured, the vulnerabilities that are present, and the solutions that will help secure those vulnerabilities while ensuring that they're compliant with HIPAA regulations.

Implementing a business continuity plan can be a major investment. Therefore, along with PAETEC's free network assessment, the company also has two unique programs, Equipment for Services (EFS) and Software for Services (SFS), which were created to help healthcare companies afford the solutions they need to implement a business continuity plan. Organizations can subsidize the cost of equipment and software, as well as receive reimbursements and upfront capital from the federal government.

Since 1998, PAETEC has funded more than \$90 million in network equipment and software costs for more than 4,800 customers. Because of this support, customers are able to comply with HIPAA regulations while modernizing their networks to ensure that their businesses continue to run properly.

For an industry that deals with data as vital as health records, business continuity is one of the most important plans an organization can have in place. HIPAA has forced healthcare entities to recognize the importance of business continuity solutions.

EHM Whitepaper
November 1, 2010

PAETEC can help these organizations understand how the appropriate network infrastructure will allow for the implementation of a business continuity plan.

For more information

[To learn more about PAETEC's Business Continuity Solutions, click here to download a brochure with more information.](#)