



Legal wake-up call → Lost records led Texas facility to StarDoc

Imagine it's the middle of winter. The winds blowing across the Texas panhandle bite with cold. In the coldest of winters in Childress, Texas, it can reach 20 below.

Or imagine the height of summer with the temperature hitting 115 degrees and you work at Childress Regional Medical Center and need to pull the medical record on a patient who hasn't seen the doctor in a few years.

Winter? Dress warmly. Summer? Well, think cool, because you're headed to "the Barn"...Childress' unheated, uncooled metal building storing 80,000 patient records.

"It seemed like there were millions and millions of pieces of paper there, but you could never find the one you needed," said Kathy McLain, Childress' business office manager.

Knowing that record storage was inadequate, Childress administrators got a legal wake-up call in 1998 when a patient needed access to an account that was four years old. "To this day, we haven't found it," McLain said. "Luckily, it was just about a bill, not a medical record, and the patient was a friend and didn't sue."

The issue of legal liability, combined with the financial resources being expended on paper, ink, printers and employee time to file and retrieve patient records, led administrators to seek a better records storage solution.

Enter StarDoc.

StarDoc is the document management system from Digital Filing Solutions (DFS) based in Dallas, Texas. Through sharing of a common database, a user simply commands StarSystem to search for a name or report. A listing appears on the screen and the user chooses the desired record. Behind the scenes, StarSystem interfaces with StarDoc to search for the record stored on a compact disc and bring it to the screen.

Childress, a 60-bed general hospital, started using the StarDoc module Oct. 22. By mid-December, a staffer in McLain's office working full-time had already scanned two years of statistical records, creating four CDs of information. That's the equivalent of 80,000 documents.

In those two months, "it's saved my life twice," McLain said, explaining how she needed important historical records on short notice.

"Now, we're printing very few of the reports off CSS. Most everything is going to StarDoc," she said. "I do a lot of accounting on (Microsoft) Excel or Word. I don't have to print them out."

McLain said she'll have a better grasp of the cost avoidance after more experience with StarDoc, but she did estimate a savings of two hours per day in employee time and \$10,000 a year in paper and forms in her office alone.

Custom Software Systems



She expects to earn back the investment in the storage system within two to two-and-a-half years.

When McLain's staff began scanning medical records, she brought in nurses and physicians to show them what the system could do.

"They were very impressed," McLain said, and immediately saw applications within their area. They predicted a 30-minute reduction in the admissions process.

"Say someone came in with a trauma situation and they needed special medication, but were allergic to some medications. StarDoc would allow nurses to be pulling up the old medical records, while the pharmacists pulled up drug records and the doctors reviewed former EKG tests."

"They are anxiously awaiting access to the system," McLain said. "We're trying to get enough records (scanned into the system) to make it meaningful."

McLain is impressed with StarDoc's security capabilities and its flexibility.

"I feel the security is just about as good as can be anywhere" with passwords and various levels of security. Employees only have access to what they need to know, McLain said. "Nurses can't get to financial information and housekeepers can't get into medical records. Also, nurses can't write on physician notes and physicians can't write on nurses notes."

It's totally flexible, McLain said. "You can set it up the way you want to. Even after they brought it in and set it up, we were able to change some parameters."

Childress Regional Medical Center is so pleased with its StarDoc solution, administrators have bragged to other facilities in west Texas, making a presentation to a quarterly meeting of their regional hospital coalition.

"I guess you can tell I'm very happy with the system," said Kathy McLain, Childress' business office manager. "It's been very, very good."