

Healthcare organisations are vulnerable to cyber-attacks. Our final newsletter for Cyber Security Month (October 2023), focuses on the importance of secure messaging. It details some of the risks associated with using faxes and the benefits of sending secure eReferrals.



Cyber Security Awareness Month 2023

'Be cyber wise - don't compromise'

Is a fax considered secure messaging?

The simple answer is no. Sharing patient and clinical information via post, fax or unsecured emails has the potential to put your practice at risk.

How a traditional fax machine puts your practice at risk

Every business is likely to transfer private information frequently. Even those that have a number of security precautions can overlook the risks of sending unsecured faxes.

If you send sensitive information, such as employee, billing or contact details, financial reports and patient records, you have an important responsibility to keep that information from getting into the wrong hands.

1. Be aware of regulatory compliance obligations

A breach can not only impact your organisation's reputation, but a breach of [Australian Privacy Principles](#) can lead to regulatory action and penalties.

General practices have a responsibility to protect the privacy of patient health information and comply with relevant legislation.

The RACGP resource - [Privacy and managing health information in general practice](#), provides an overview of the legislative framework that regulates the way personal information is handled within the general practice setting.

2. Fax machines in high-traffic areas

To be easily accessible, fax machines are commonly placed in open areas. While this is convenient, it is not secure. Having a fax machine out in the open means that anyone can potentially access the information that comes through a fax machine.

3. Fax access after hours

It is important to consider the security risks posed by people who might access your building after hours and without supervision. Ensure documents containing personal information aren't accessible.

4. You can't guarantee security on the other end

Even if your fax machine is in a secure location, you cannot control where faxes end up. Sending private information via unsecured fax is always risky.

Fax versus secure messaging

Should your practice reevaluate your use of fax to transfer sensitive information? Indeed, many hospitals are now choosing to transition from fax to electronic communications with general practices via secure messaging.

Secure messaging

Secure messaging is the preferred way of communicating clinical information between healthcare providers. It involves the use of software to encrypt messages which are delivered securely and seamlessly to the practice software of the receiving clinician. Note that emails are generally not encrypted and can potentially be intercepted, so they are not recommended for clinical information.

The advantages of secure messaging include:

- enhanced privacy and security
- improved clinical care and coordination of care
- streamlined administrative processes
- integration with software
- improved patient matching
- ability to check audit trail
- reduced use of paper
- cost effectiveness
- timesaving.

Types of messages that can be sent and received via secure messaging include:

- referral letters
- discharge summaries
- radiology reports
- pathology results.

Where to start with secure messaging

There are several secure messaging software systems used by medical practices. The first step in setting up secure messaging involves choosing an appropriate provider compatible with your conformant clinical information system.

If you are not sure where to start with secure messaging, access the [Australian Digital Health Agency secure messaging implementation guide](#).

Secure eReferral letters

The eReferral system works by extracting data from the patient's electronic medical record and putting it into the eReferral template, which is then sent electronically to the receiving health service without the need to print and fax. A copy is also automatically stored securely in the patient's record.

Local eReferral use

While there are several third party eReferral products currently available, Murray PHN funds the purchase, installation, education and ongoing support of BPAC SeNT eReferral Module to support general practices.

Practices in the Goulburn Valley, Central and North West Victoria regions are using SeNT referrals to generate, safe and secure referrals to health services in Bendigo, Shepparton, Swan Hill and Mildura for specialist services, with planning underway to expand into the North East.

Get involved

Murray PHN's digital health team are contacting GPs with eligible clinical systems to be part of BPAC SeNT eReferral Module regional roll outs.

If you would like to know more prior, contact the digital health team: digitalhealth@murrayphn.org.au or [click here](#) to visit Murray PHN's eReferral webpage.

How we can help you

In addition to telehealth, eReferrals and secure messaging, below are some of the other key digital health technologies which may benefit your practice. Click on the tiles to find out more.

