PACS re-envisioned

Changes to reading workflow can create higher service levels at no additional cost.

By Phil Heckendorn

The delivery of radiology services is being squeezed by conflicting realities: While reimbursements are declining, healthcare providers need rapid report turnaround at any time of the day or night to provide enhanced patient care. Providers also want immediate access to subspecialty radiologists for difficult cases.

In the past, satisfying these expectations would require a dramatic increase in cost, which healthcare providers cannot afford. But new technology makes it possible to achieve a higher level of service within the existing fee structure.

We deployed Vue Connect powered by SuperPACS™ technology, which exchanges information with disparate RIS and PACS systems at any location to create a streamlined multi-site reading workflow.

This solution can be implemented by healthcare systems that want to establish highly efficient reading and reporting for their hospitals, urgent care centers, outpatient imaging clinics and other locations or by radiology groups that serve multiple institutions. In the past, fully featured reading across multiple sites often required replacing existing RIS and PACS systems and standardizing on a single vendor's platform so patient data and images could be easily shared.

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This new architecture offers our group the following benefits:

• **A universal patient work list for all the independent healthcare facilities we serve.** This intelligent infrastructure tracks the patient name, identification number and originating provider for each exam so reports can be automatically communicated to the correct site.

• **Efficient communication with disparate RIS and PACS at each healthcare delivery site.** This not only enables prior imaging studies to be automatically delivered to radiologists to expedite reading, it also eliminates errors and delays caused by the need to manually forward appropriate prior exams from each facility.

• **A single user interface with fully featured voice recognition and advanced reading features available on any workstation or PC for highly productive on-site and off-site reading.** This eliminates the need for radiologists to use multiple workstations and different user interfaces, which hampers efficiency.

• **The ability to verify accurate receipt of the exam by teleradiologists.** This system communicates exam metadata to the work list client, native server and the hospital, ensuring that a complete exam has been transmitted and received.

RadCare is a national practice with 80 radiologists and 30 teleradiologists that together read 2 million imaging studies a year. We recently invested in this new architecture to equip us to deliver faster, higher quality service without any increase in price to our clients.

Dramatic productivity gains, faster reporting

This technology pays for itself by dramatically improving radiologist productivity for reading both daytime and after-hours exams. We estimated a payback of five years based on conservative projections for increased billing by radiologists and teleradiologists.

Initial productivity gains indicate we might exceed that goal. That increased productivity also translates into better service for our clients. We are now able to deliver stat reports in as little as 20 minutes and standard reports in as little as 30 minutes. Exams can be automatically routed to specialists for immediate reporting.

In addition, our after-hours teleradiologists can deliver a final read because they have access to prior imaging studies and all the patient information. This eliminates the standard practice of obtaining a preliminary overnight read followed by a final read the next day. Equipping teleradiologists to function like on-site radiologists creates dramatic savings for healthcare providers. For radiology groups such as ours, Vue Connect with SuperPACS is a double win because it increases capacity and also significantly reduces non-billable hours for our radiologists and teleradiologists.

We are currently deploying this technology to the providers we serve. In the coming months we plan to market our improved service and increased capacity to earn additional clients.

The delivery of radiology services has always been a challenging field. Leading-edge technology that enables faster, more-efficient reading and reporting among disparate RIS/PACS systems and independent facilities will help healthcare providers and radiologists overcome declining reimbursements. But the best news of all is that this technology can lead to improved patient care, which is the ultimate goal for all healthcare organizations. **HMT**