

How Data Centers Help the Medical Profession Comply with HIPAA Regulations

When President Clinton signed the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) in 1996, he established national standards for electronic health care transactions—and created a golden business opportunity for DataHEALTH™ (www.datahealthusa.com) of Ashland, KY.

“We’re the leading data backup and recovery provider in the health industry,” states President and CEO James Dalton. “We provide online data protection for physicians’ offices and hospitals and help them comply with HIPAA standards.”

The DataHEALTH data center

The DataHEALTH data center offers small-to-medium-size companies a level of data security that, until recently, was only available to large corporations—at a fraction of the cost.

“The critical difference between our data center and ordinary data backup is security,” Dalton explains. “For example, all our equipment is fully redundant. Our architecture features eight servers, including Compaq on the front end, Chaparral on the back end and staging servers in the middle to handle information. Plus we offer clients continual monitoring of their backup event to ensure they’re successful.

“To prevent natural disasters we use Halon FM200 fire suppression, environmental cooling plus a dual power grid with a backup generator.

“To protect against online intruders we use a sophisticated firewall and McAfee antiviral protection, which allows us to continually monitor for viruses and worms. We use an advanced encryption algorithm built into our NovaNET-WEB software to ensure privacy.

“To protect against onsite intruders we have tight security that restricts physical access.

“In short, our high degree of checks and balances protects customers’ data more securely—and often more cost effectively—than they can themselves.”

Protecting against data loss

The business lifeblood of any health care firm, e.g., physician’s office, hospital, is its data. If a disaster occurs and they lose computerized patient records, accounting, scheduling, payroll or other information, they might never get back on their feet.

In fact, a recent study by the National Archives and Records Administration found that only 43 percent of businesses suffering such a disaster ever recover sufficiently enough to resume business. In addition, 93 percent of businesses that lose their data for 10 days or more file for bankruptcy within one year.

Even if a company loses data access for a day—or an hour—the cost of lost productivity can be significant.

Many health care professionals think their data is safe because they back up to tape. And while tape drives normally provide satisfactory backup, problems do arise. For example, if the drive malfunctions, or if the tape is old, data may not get backed up. Unfortunately, administrators won’t know this until they try to restore lost data and discover the tape is blank.

Meeting HIPAA regulations

As hospitals, pharmacies, physicians and others gather, process and track such data as health insurance coverage, accounting, scheduling and payroll, they store large amounts of personal information regarding patients’ financials and health—just the kind of juicy data hackers and identity thieves feast on.

Part of HIPAA's mandate is establishing privacy and security standards that protect such data from inappropriate use and disclosure.

In 2001, the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) adopted final regulations for security standards that protect electronic health information systems from improper access or alteration. Health care professionals are responsible for protecting the confidentiality, integrity and availability of electronic-protected health information by implementing administrative, physical and technical safeguards. Failure to comply can result in fines and/or jail time.

The online backup solution

Increasingly, health care companies are looking to the Internet to solve their backup problems because of the Web's many advantages. For example, it eliminates manual backups. Since online backup is automatic, the most difficult choice an administrator has is when to schedule backups (hourly, daily, weekly, etc.). This also eliminates the need to rotate tapes to keep them fresh. Since administrators get backup reports, they know their data is securely stored. And if problems arise, they receive error messages to alert them.

Online backup occurs in the background, so business is never interrupted.

Online data, when stored in a facility like the DataHEALTH data center, is incredibly secure, which satisfies HIPAA.

NovaNET-WEB—the heart of the system

NovaStor's NovaNET-WEB backup software is at the very heart of DataHEALTH's backup software.

"We selected NovaNET-WEB for several reasons," Dalton says. "One is its FastBIT technology that's better technology than traditional delta block transfers because it makes changes on the binary level. Since only new data and changes are backed up instead of complete documents, backups are significantly faster, better compressed and more cost efficient for our customers."

Encryption technology is also important. Many programs use 128-bit encryption. NovaNET-WEB's 448-bit blowfish encryption offers a higher level of security that complies with HIPAA requirements.

Finally, the software is extremely easy for DataHEALTH clients to download, install and begin using immediately. A NovaNET-WEB wizard walks them through the entire process. For those clients preferring the human touch, DataHEALTH technicians walk them through the process, explaining what options they should select and what data should be backed up.

Caring for health care professionals

"Health care professionals do a wonderful job caring for their patients," Dalton concludes. "Thanks to our great staff and partners, we offer our clients the most advanced technology possible so they're never distracted by worrying about protecting their data or meeting HIPAA compliance."

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