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A complete guide to Medical Records Scanning



About The Author



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Ruth Gooda is the Head of Healthcare Solutions at EDM Group and has more than 15 years' experience implementing information management solutions for high profile organisations looking to manage and reduce their paper, and improve efficiency through process change. Over the past five years Ruth has specialised in the healthcare sector, advising on and undertaking some of the largest and most challenging medical record digitisation projects across the country.

“Whilst Trusts are often discouraged by the initial investment necessary to move from paper to electronic data at a time when the NHS is under extreme financial pressures, the return on this investment is soon realised, not just by real estate savings but by the efficiencies that digital transformation delivers. I am proud to have helped deliver many such projects and look forward to continuing this work with more Trusts in the future.”



Introduction

While most industries are already on the path to digitisation, **the healthcare sector is falling behind**, with only 25% of NHS Trusts considered to be 'paper free' at the point of care. However, strict regulations such as [GDPR](#) and the initiative for healthcare organisations to be paper free by the end of 2023 in the [NHS 10 Year Plan](#) are urgently driving the need for **rapid digitisation** across the healthcare sector.

There is an ever-increasing demand for the technology to enable new ways of working that will **improve and enhance patient services, experience and care whilst reducing overall costs**. For healthcare organisations, the pressure to do this can be overwhelming, however they must be prepared to meet these challenges head-on if they want to be on track with the NHS' plan for digital transformation. The COVID-19 crisis has allowed many Trusts to accelerate their digital programme with Government support.

One of the ways healthcare organisations can begin their digital transformation journey is through [medical records scanning](#). In this guide, we outline everything that healthcare organisations need to know about digitising their medical records: from why paper medical records are causing issues in the healthcare sector, to how to choose a vendor for your document scanning needs.

The problem with paper medical records

Despite the pressure to digitise, many healthcare providers are still using legacy systems and manual processes, including the use of **paper medical records**. As it stands, it currently costs the NHS [£300 million a year](#) to store and manage these records, money that could be better spent elsewhere by the NHS. On top of this, paper-based medical records pose huge challenges for healthcare organisations, including:

Paper medical records are prone to human error

Physical paper records which will contain sensitive and private information are at risk of being misfiled or lost, which could potentially have serious consequences. Additionally, where paper medical records are being manually filed they become prone to mistakes happening, such as staff recording incorrect information, which increases clinical risk.

Paper medical records leave healthcare organisations open to compliance issues

The introduction of data protection regulations such as [GDPR](#) means that now more than ever, medical

records in paper format are particularly prone to risk, and ensuring those records are protected is of vital importance. If a [disaster](#) occurs such as irreversible damage or loss, this can put healthcare organisations at risk of serious compliance violations.

Paper medical records are expensive

The true cost of managing paper medical records is often underestimated, and creating these documents is just one part of the costs. The [NHS](#) reported that the estimated annual cost of maintaining an onsite medical records library is **between £500,000 and £1 million for each Trust** - which could be better spent on additional medical resources.

These challenges are just some examples of why the **target of becoming paperless by the end of 2023** is part of the NHS 10 year plan, which details hopes for secondary healthcare providers to become **fully digitised** through a number of core goals for the NHS.

Common records management challenges

Paper medical records and manual processes have proven to present **significant challenges for healthcare organisations** across the sector, including NHS Trusts, GPs and private practices.

These challenges are **jeopardising the quality of healthcare** that these organisations are able to provide, and impacting negatively the care that patients receive. These are just some examples of the challenges that healthcare organisations are facing when managing medical records that directly impact patient care:

- There are a limited or lack of effective systems for opening, tracking and indexing medical documents.
- There is a lack of training, legal and regulatory tools in place regarding records management.
- Staff have no effective method of capturing and preserving records.

- There is a lack of knowledge of electronic records and how they should be stored.
- The current records management system is inadequate.
- There are no plans in place for managing **electronic records** effectively and efficiently.

Each of these challenges leads to complications which can directly impact the care that patients receive: from loss of documents to inexperienced staff tasked with managing important medical records.

However, in order to avoid these issues, healthcare organisations **need to have an effective records management system in place** that ensures that the quality of healthcare isn't affected by poor internal processes.



Why are only 25% of NHS Trusts considered paper free?

It is widely acknowledged that the healthcare industry could **significantly benefit from digitisation**. Unfortunately however, despite the ambitious NHS 10 Year Plan progress has been much slower than anticipated - with only **25% of NHS Trusts** currently considered to be 'paper free' at the point of care.

There are a number of reasons why the healthcare sector is so far behind when it comes to digitisation, despite the obvious benefits.

These include:

- Medical records libraries often hold **thousands of documents in paper format**, which poses an obvious problem when it comes to digitisation: *where to begin?*
- Many organisations are overwhelmed by the perceived enormity of this task, and are reluctant to change as a result. **London North West University Healthcare NHS Trust** faced these exact issues - their huge file repository meant that the process of finding and accessing files was very time-consuming; however, they overcame

these challenges first by reducing the number of medical records libraries by four to two achieved by removing inactive files for offsite storage, and then by accelerating their digital transformation programme to create **an effective yet flexible digital solution** which will make files immediately accessible to clinical staff once rolled out throughout the organisation.

- In a sector with strict rules surrounding patient confidentiality, security risks are a huge concern. Digitisation would require a **complete overhaul of cybersecurity** where additional protection is required, especially in relation to **GDPR**. However, many Trusts have been able to overcome these compliance concerns and future-proof their medical records to comply with GDPR and ensure that patient confidentiality is maintained throughout the organisation.

These are just some of the reasons why NHS Trusts are behind on digitisation, as well as how organisations can work to overcome digital barriers.



What are the key benefits of digitising medical records?

Digitisation will allow healthcare providers and organisations to deliver **coherent and improved services**, because it will enable staff to focus their attention on patients, rather than the demanding administrative work required to manage paper medical records. In the NHS 10 year plan, this was the driving force - with a clear desire to create **collaborative services** that could be achieved through the digitisation of medical records.

Healthcare organisations stand to gain a number of key benefits from digitising their medical records, including:

Increased efficiency

Across the NHS as a whole, it takes an estimated 10,000 full time staff to manage medical records, which means other, more important tasks are neglected in favour of maintaining, sourcing and accessing paper medical records from a physical location. When these medical records are digitised, less staff are required in these roles, meaning you can **make better use of resources**.

Digitisation also supports the need for **quick, safe and secure access to medical records**, all of which cannot be achieved with paper document storage. When medical records are made digital through scanning,

they are made **instantly accessible** in the Trust's electronic document management system and staff can view updates in real time.

Reduced paper handling costs

NHS England reported that the estimated annual cost of storing paper storage is between **£500,000 and £1 million** for each Trust - a cost which goes away when medical records are digitised.

Once medical records are electronic, there is limited need for physical storage - which saves healthcare organisations' real estate costs and allows the space to be used for clinical purposes.

What are the key benefits of digitising medical records?

Improved patient care

When healthcare professionals have instant access to the most recent clinical information, [patients receive better care](#).

Because everyone has access to the same information in real-time, digital medical records can provide **information in an instant**, which enables healthcare professionals to stay up-to-date with changing patient requirements and reduces the clinical risk.

Digital records facilitate the access of patient notes from existing on-site and off-site storage, which drastically **reduces the time spent on administration**. When healthcare professionals don't have to devote time to maintaining and sourcing medical records, they are able to deliver better care to their patients - clinical staff can access records when required, and physicians can assess them when they need them.

Improved compliance

Healthcare organisations often handle personal and private data on a daily basis, which leaves them at **risk of non-compliance** with strict legislation such as [GDPR](#). When there is no effective records management process in place, **the risk is even greater**.

This is a major problem for NHS Trusts, where medical records libraries **are too large and disorganised** to manage and access records efficiently. As a result, this means records are easily misplaced, and the records become vulnerable to data breaches and loss of integrity.

With digital medical records, **these risks are significantly reduced**. Electronic storage means that records will no longer be misplaced, and since digital records are only accessible to authorised personnel, it improves the security of the document, guarantees compliance with ISO 27001, 9001 and BS10008, and ensures patient confidentiality is maintained.



For more information on how going digital can keep your medical records compliant, read our blog: [5 ways your data is vulnerable to GDPR compliance violations](#).

In-house vs. outsourced medical records scanning: Which is best?

Some healthcare organisations are already aware of the benefits that come from scanning paper medical records: it can **dramatically reduce costs, keep your patients' medical data more secure, reduce clinical risk and improve patient care**. However, the volume of medical records that healthcare organisations need to digitise has **increased tenfold in the last five years**, which can make the process of scanning documents difficult and overwhelming.

Despite this, when done correctly, medical record scanning can be a **painless process that quickly shows a return on your investment**. With this in mind, there are two ways that healthcare organisations can choose to digitise their medical records - you can do it in-house, or outsource it to a professional document scanning and management company.

OPTION 1:

In-house medical records scanning

The majority of healthcare organisations will have a vast number of active and legacy medical records, and to scan all of them is a huge task to take on in-house. In order to scan records so that they are future proof and compliant with data regulations, organisations choosing to scan in-house will have to consider the following:

Do you have the right scanning equipment?

Standard office-based scanners will not be able to cope with a high volume of records, so you will need to invest in a scanner that is fit for purpose. However, you must bear in mind that this technology will become obsolete, and many scanners will **still not be able to cope** with the complexity of medical records.

Do you have the resources?

Even if you do have the correct equipment, you need to have the resources to manage it. This would require

staff to be trained on how to use the equipment and meet deadlines set by physicians, and this isn't always possible in busy environments.

What are your indexing requirements?

After scanning, you will need to consider how you plan to search and retrieve records, which may require manual indexing. If your indexing requirements become complex, then this will **slow down the entire scanning process** and potentially increase the number of medical records that need to be scanned.

If your organisation doesn't meet these requirements listed (or [additional requirements](#) listed in our article), it could be beneficial to seek an outsourced medical records scanning provider.

In-house vs. outsourced medical records scanning: Which is best?

OPTION 2:

Outsourced medical records scanning

Outsourced scanning is usually recommended for large-scale digitisation projects and is generally **faster and more affordable** than trying to do it in-house.

However, it's important to select a company that understands the healthcare sector and the regulations they need to be compliant with. That being said, a good scanning provider will deliver a number of benefits to your business, including:

- Providing the necessary knowledge, experience and skills to undertake scanning of records for the healthcare sector, so your documents will be scanned to meet regulatory requirements.
- Possessing the ability to undertake large-scale scanning projects with ease, reducing the risk of error and disruption to day-to-day activities.

- The fact that outsourced scanning is usually a faster and more affordable process than scanning in-house.
- By not scanning in-house your resources can be better utilised - staff are able to focus on more important tasks to support the delivery of patient care.

While outsourcing medical record scanning is a more cost-effective and efficient solution, whether you choose this method depends entirely on **what is best for your business in terms of cost and resources.**



How does the medical records scanning process work?

Medical records scanning requires an established, well thought-out and detailed plan, where records are scanned to an agreed timeframe. A summary of the [steps of this plan](#) are as follows:

STEP 1

The process begins by selecting the records to be digitised, and then barcoding and packing the records into boxes.

STEP 2

The records are then safely transported from the hospital by a fleet of GPS tracked vans and DBS-checked drivers to the processing facility.

STEP 3

At this stage, records are expertly prepared for scanning, which is a complex process that requires careful attention to detail.

STEP 4

Once scanned, the resulting images are processed, quality checked and usually converted into PDF format at volume or section level. The files are then stored in a secure hosted document management system, and after a period of usually no more than 3 months the original records can be destroyed.

STEP 5

Records will be easily accessible within the Trust as well as being made available to the community through a secure, multi-tenanted image hosting platform that will allow individuals visibility of their own medical records – all with appropriate access.

STEP 6

In obtaining GDPR-specific permissions for the use of patient records for research purposes, powerful tools can be applied to the Digital Vault, which will allow for medical records to be easily searchable, allowing access instantly. See how EDM does this [here](#).

Digitised medical records: what's next?

Once medical records become electronic, they have the potential to **revolutionise the way healthcare organisations** deliver patient care. Instant access to medical records means they can be shared throughout different organisations - through means of integrated care - all with complete ease.

Additionally, it becomes much easier for **patients to access their own records**, involving them in your decision-making process and giving them more control over their own care. This can help streamline processes and enable collaborative care, because everyone is able to access important information - from clinical staff and physicians to the patients themselves.

Ultimately, once your medical records are digitised, **it significantly improves patient care**. Once you are able to store and access medical records in an

efficient way, you reduce the time spent organising and maintaining them. There is less risk involved with digital medical records, as they are scanned according to GDPR regulations and stored in a highly secure platform where your patients' information is completely safe.

Digitising your existing paper medical records is the **first step** for healthcare organisations in the digital journey to becoming paperless. By taking your organisation through this digital transformation, you enable the ability to deliver **seamless care across traditional organisational boundaries** by sharing clinical information and providing access to patient information for those that need it in every environment across the healthcare sector.



Crucial questions to ask a medical records scanning provider

Once you have decided to outsource medical records scanning, how do you select a provider - especially when you have a large-scale project? There are key considerations and questions to ask before making a decision. This will ensure that the organisation you choose is **equipped to handle and safely process medical records** in-line with your requirements. These are just a few examples of the points you should be considering:

1. What is the typical turnaround time for bulk scanning projects? Do you have the capacity to handle large projects?
2. How can we be sure our documents/records are safe in transit when they leave our premises?
3. What quality and security standards do you hold?
4. How can scanning documents help us comply with our regulatory requirements?

The medical records scanning provider you choose should be able to answer these questions with ease, and prove they have the knowledge and experience to deal with the complexities and requirements of your particular organisation.

EDM: the best choice for medical records scanning

The time for healthcare organisations to go paperless is now.

With the NHS facing government cuts and research revealing the **considerable impact of the cuts upon patient care**, it is now imperative that healthcare organisations begin the digital transformation process as soon as possible. Those that have already gone down this route will have been much better placed to manage patient care during COVID-19.

As avid supporters of NHS Digital Transformation, our **dedicated healthcare experts** understand the complexities and concerns the healthcare sector has regarding digitisation: from regulation worries to

concerns about the confidentiality of medical records. Our [medical records scanning solution](#) aims to help healthcare providers become less reliant on paper, by making medical records digitally available to all healthcare professionals easily in order to improve patient care - without compromising compliance.

We have worked with and supported the digital transformation of many high profile Trusts, delivering digital solutions to each aspect of these organisations through the scanning of medical records, with the shared primary goal of **improving patient care**, as well as meeting NHS goals.



Ready to begin your digital transformation journey?

[Speak to a Healthcare Expert](#) at EDM today to see how we can help your healthcare organisation improve patient care and compliance by going digital.

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About EDM

For over 40 years, EDM has a proven track record of working with large organisations across the financial, health, insurance and retail sectors to deliver high profile and high volume document digitization projects within strict SLAs and to a high standard. EDM has helped some of the world's most prestigious organisations become more efficient and protect against risk.

Our expertise enables us to bridge the gap from analogue to digital using proven technologies to handle business-critical information and processes more effectively. Our innovative solutions ensure that both private and public sector businesses can transform their processes that will provide a multitude of benefits such as:

-  Improved productivity
-  Lower operating costs
-  Enriched customer engagement
-  Improved responsiveness
-  Competitive advantage
-  Improved quality and compliance

If you want to learn more about EDM or how we help our customers transition to digital ways of working, **contact us** > [in](#) [twitter](#) [youtube](#)

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