

Records Retention and Disposition: Should We Retain Archived Digital Imaging Studies Older Than Ten Years?

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Background/Problem Being Solved

Many institutions have accumulated massive archives of digital imaging studies, including numerous exams greater than ten years of age. These are associated with storage, migration and management costs as well as privacy and security concerns. Some states have disposition requirements which direct state institutions to delete their records, including digital medical images, on a schedule (e.g. according to Virginia's 2022 General Schedule GS-120, digital medical images should be deleted after 10 years). Whether state or private institution, should we delete imaging studies over 10 years of age due to cost and privacy concerns, or do they still have enough value to the care of the patients?

Intervention(s)

We queried our PACS database to evaluate if studies older than 10 years of age had been accessed by our providers in the last two years.

Barriers/Challenges

Storage, migration and management costs as well as privacy and security concerns of archived studies. Some states have requirements directing state medical institutions to delete records, including digital medical images. Is it better for the patient to delete or retain these imaging records? And how do we decide that?

Outcome

In the last 2 years (i.e. 730 days) our providers accessed 201,086 imaging studies in PACS that were older than 10 years. This is approximately 5% of our studies older than ten years of age. Thus, in just two years' time, nearly 1 in 20 older studies were loaded into PACS for viewing, generally for comparison during the interpretation of new studies.

Conclusion/Statement of Impact/Lessons Learned

When digital medical images are easily accessible via PACS, they continue to be used commonly in clinical decision making beyond 10 years. This value to the patient should be factored into disposition decisions, along with cost and privacy concerns.

Synopsis

When considering when to prune older archived imaging studies due to cost and privacy concerns, we should also consider the potential value of retention to the patient. We found that studies over 10 years of age were still commonly called upon to contribute to medical decision making.

Keywords

Administration & Operations; Enterprise Imaging; Security; Storage; Systems Management