



BOSTON - LONDON - ZURICH

Complex Study Reveals Medical Privacy has High Costs

CASE STUDY – CBGT1

Service:

Independent Verification & Validation (IVV) of Business Process and Costs.

Purpose:

Healthcare industry white paper addressing complex and high cost issue of patient information release services.

Requirement:

IVV of the complexity and expenses involved in the release of protected health information (e.g., medical records).

Situation:

The expense of protecting health information from unauthorized release and the related pricing of services providing authorized releases have been the subject of numerous discussions, legislation, and widespread litigation. While it is likely that few doubt the necessity of privacy protections, it is reasonable to inquire as to the basis of the price for a copy of a health care record as compared with the cost of non privileged information made at a local copy store.

To gain a perspective and provide clarity on this subject, Semaphore reviewed and analyzed the activities required to fulfill requests for the release of health information. The information presented in this activity provided both facts and commentary about the complexity and expense of patient information release services accompanied by recommendations for developing a reasonable price for providing those services.

Scope:

Staffing: eight person weeks
Deliverable: a written report of findings

Discovery:

This study is notable because of its comprehensive consideration of the expenses and complexity of releasing patient health information. Semaphore conducted time and motion surveys at six hospitals representing a cross-section of facility size, geography, and health information release service providers. In addition, Semaphore reviewed recent and detailed

information release services' financial and operational data from over 200 facilities that included more than one million information requests and over fifty million copied pages over a twelve-month period.

Semaphore's study represents a milestone in the healthcare and health information request services' industry due to the depth and breadth in the analysis of on-site data, as well as the extensive financial and operational data.

Findings:

1. The release of protected health care information involves a minimum of 37 steps.
2. Patient care information is predominantly maintained in paper form such that there is frequent complexity in releasing the information because of misfiling, incomplete information, and/or the release requires collecting the requested information from multiple storage locations.
3. About two thirds of on-site labor time is identified with activities directly related to patient information release services. The balance of labor time is required for extensive customer service and a myriad of activities that do not fall neatly into locating, screening and copying information for release.
4. Less than half of the information requests are billable, requiring that the minority be charged additionally to cover the cost of serving the remaining information requests.
5. The base price for releasing protected health information is high – regardless of record size – because activities such as verifying that the request meets privacy protection requirements and locating and refilling the medical record information comprise well over half of the expenses associated with a median sized patient information request.