

IMAGING INFORMATICS

Managing the Flow in Radiology

Private Cloud for Providers and Patients

By Chris Gaerig

It is no secret that teleradiology is a divisive topic in the medical imaging community. From arguments over the legitimacy of some of the industry's practices to the foreboding notion that some teleradiology firms are attempting to overtake local radiology groups, the practice has stirred a fair amount of discussion. In lieu of these debates, most teleradiology practices claim to partner with local radiology practices, rather than forcing them out of contracts, but few firms take the approach that Poway, Calif.-based teleradiology services company StatRad has with its new cloud image storage system.

"We've developed our own systems to transmit images in support of our teleradiology business, and found that there's a growing demand from our clients for the ability to share those images with outside parties," said Joe Mook, managing partner, StatRad. "Not only would they be available for the referring physicians to increase business for those hospitals or imaging centers, but also for the patients themselves should they wish to personally archive their images rather than collecting CDs."

On the surface, StatRad's "cloud-based image distribution" system is not unlike similar solutions—access is given to both patients and physicians on a secure network—but the company is offering the solution free of charge to both their teleradiology clients as well as those facilities that are interested in the technology but do not pay for the company's services.

"It started because of requests from our teleradiology clients, but we're actually going to be offering to install this cloud solution for free in hospitals around the country," said Mook.

The StatRad cloud solution is a HIPAA-compliant system. The private cloud differs from public clouds like Microsoft Windows Azure because of precautionary steps necessitated by HIPAA. For example, to be HIPAA compliant, hardware and hard drives need to be destroyed if they are no longer in use and there was any patient data



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on them. Public clouds include information from countless sources and are typically unable to follow guidelines like this.

"Basically, we are partnering with organizations that allow us to create the private cloud and balance the retention and distribution of images among multiple facilities and a high number of Internet backbones to ensure uptime," said Vishal Verma, MD, medical director at StatRad. "We also ensure that everything is completely secure and inaccessible to anyone outside of who we allow access to. We started out looking at all the public cloud providers. They're very cost-effective and there are a lot of benefits to them, but none of them can be completely HIPAA compliant."

The benefits of this system are both economic and patient-centered. Aside from the free installation and implementation of the system, the use of the cloud-storage solution eliminates the need for physical CDs and storage devices, saving costs to the facilities. In addition, this system is intended to decrease the amount of scans necessary for a patient. If each patient has access to his scans, he can avoid repeat scans by allowing access to referring physicians.

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ing images to referring physicians, is reducing unnecessary or duplicated exams,” said Verma. “If a patient has a scan at a hospital in town and 2 weeks later goes to a different health care system, rather than getting a repeat scan, if both hospitals are connected to the cloud, they can easily access all of the prior imaging of the patient.”

Currently, StatRad has several facilities that will beta test the cloud solution, after which the company will offer it to facilities across the nation. And the sooner they can get this solution into new facilities, the better, because for StatRad the primary goal of this and all their solutions is benefiting the patients.

“It’s really about improving patient care,” said Moock. “We’re not out to take over radiology contracts or displace radiology groups. We’re here to support radiology groups, not only with our reading services, but also with our infrastructure technology and efficiencies. We thought that this was another way we could help improve patient care.”

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