



PANDEMIC ACCELERATES
**THE ADOPTION OF
ELECTRONIC DOCUMENTATION
AND E-SIGNATURE SOLUTIONS
IN HEALTHCARE**



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The coronavirus pandemic that has swept across the globe has had a powerful impact on hospitals and healthcare systems. It spurred them to rapidly adopt or scale telehealth solutions so they can see patients remotely but also better manage the safe flow of patients who needed in-person visits with their clinicians. The crisis cut through the organizational inertia of healthcare institutions and motivated them to enact changes that had long been on their to-do list. It forced them to set up myriad tools to support these hybrid models of care, from chatbots to video visits.

The [Accenture](#) 2021 Digital Health Tech Vision report highlighted the healthcare transformation that's taken place over the past 18 months. It was found in a survey of 399 healthcare executives across six countries that the majority (86%) believe that their healthcare organization's business and technology strategies are becoming inseparable—even indistinguishable.

Underscoring this point is a new survey from FoxitSoftware examining the shift to paperless medical documents and processes, including which departments continue to use paper and why. It reveals that the Covid-19 pandemic has given a new sense of urgency for healthcare organizations to shift parts of their business that rely on paper-based documents to digital documents.

"Healthcare documents hold a wealth of data. Collecting, managing, and sharing these data securely has become the top priority for every healthcare organization we have worked with," according to Deboshree Sarkar, Product Marketing Manager and Healthcare Marketing Vertical Leader with Foxit.

Covid-19 has made it 'urgent' for healthcare organizations to expand adoption of electronic document formats

A whopping 46% of respondents replied "significant" or "urgent", in response to the question, "Since the start of the Covid-19 public health crisis, how big of a priority has it been to adopt an electronic document format for patient-facing healthcare forms and documents?"

There is no question that the Covid-19 pandemic was a catalyst for virtual care. It's not surprising that many of the hospitals forced to rapidly expand these services now are faced with the need to digitize those paper-based documents that they continue to use for tasks such as patient feedback.

It brings us back to a fundamental issue that healthcare organizations contend with, even those that have digitized most of their operations: How to further reduce their reliance on paper and digitize these documents.

The survey of healthcare organizations was published on the MedCity News website and distributed in its daily newsletter and in emails to newsletter subscribers as well as on its social media channels.

Of the respondents who completed the survey, 41% are from the C-Suite, 9.4% are health practitioners, 9.4% are in quality, compliance or operations, and 7.8 percent are in IT.

The departments that rely on paper forms

The majority of respondents, 67%, noted that their healthcare organizations have departments that continue to rely on paper medical documents, compared with 33% that don't.

In which of the following circumstances are paper forms used? (Select all that apply)

Finance and Accounting (Medicare Billing, clinical payment approval, Invoice processing approval forms,	15.91%
Healthcare Contracts (Health plan contracts, GPO agreements etc)	13.64%
Healthcare staffing (Employee/ Physician Onboarding, Applicant	12.88%
Legal (eg: NDA agreements etc)	18.18%
Patient Care Coordination documents (eg: medical history, intake forms,	19.70%
Procurement	5.30%
Research (trial forms, patient feedback forms etc)	14.39%

As a Foxit blog post noted, eliminating paper isn't an option, but a matter of time and strategy. Paper is costly, creates storage expenses, can be challenging to share via clunky fax machines, silos information and complicates collaboration between institutions and sharing medical data. So it's not surprising that cost efficiency offers a compelling reason to go digital for 21% of survey respondents.

"Time is money and paper-based business processes are like quick sands, they are slow and also create a lot of internal inefficiencies and revenue losses within the healthcare sector," Sarkar noted.

Internal challenges

The list of write-in rationales for keeping some paper-based solutions offers a window into how institutions wrestle with security and regulatory concerns as well as their corporate culture:

- Outside party usually dictates
- Fear of questionable electronic security, familiarity with paper, lack of systems familiarity/ understanding.

- Organizational inertia
- Expense of technology and patients have little desire to use them.
- Migration from paper to digital is a tedious process
- Cannot be hacked
- They are backup in case something goes wrong with the electronic forms.
- Client driven usage but is declining
- ICT Infrastructures is still at its infancy, meaning it is not fully developed to a level where it can be easily accessible.
- Historic admin and lack of field tech in hard to connect environments
- HIPAA concerns with sending data— using secure fax.

Improving the patient experience by supporting collaboration

Care coordination and clinical research are the most patient-centered sources of paper that are prime candidates for being digitized. By enabling a patient's entire care team to exchange and view each other's assessments of a patient's condition, it can provide a more complete picture of a patient's care, avoid duplication and simplify workflows.

"With other industries digitizing their business processes and providing top notch consumer experience, the healthcare industry is now under pressure to improve their consumer experience," Sarkar observed. "There is a need for a 'digital first' mentality which calls for providing the patients with easy and secure access to data and enabling them to handle all of their document related tasks by themselves and empowering the employees with powerful digital tools that alleviates a lot of their day-to-day burden with documents."

Additionally, there are other factors motivating hospitals to make the shift to digital records, particularly Improving the patient experience. About 58% of respondents said patients expressed a preference for electronic documents over paper forms. Many believe that the hybrid model of care, making virtual and in-person care available depending on the needs and preferences of patients, is here to stay. Digitizing documents that are key

for this approach to succeed, such as patient intake forms, is an important step in making online appointments seamless.

What do healthcare organizations look for in a PDF Editor?

The majority of survey respondents, 70.6%, view the role of PDFs as increasing at their healthcare organizations. Editing tools that are easy to use or intuitive accounted for about 18% of responses. Seamless integration with a current document management system (EHR and/or other systems) and providing the integration of the electronic signature platform were preferences articulated by just over 16% of respondents.

Digital medical records, before they are shared with third parties, must enable users to search and redact information that could identify individuals, in order to comply with HIPAA requirements.

PDF Editors that don't allow users to choose perpetual licensing instead of a subscription service were a source of frustration for 17% of respondents. Lack of customer or tech support proved vexing for 15% of respondents. Other PDF Editor pet peeves include:

- PDF Editors lacking capability to share, save and retrieve documents from ECM or cloud storage: 11.7%
- Lack of customer or tech support: 15.3%
- License management issues or licenses tied to an individual user: 13.9%

“Many of our healthcare customers have fax-elimination and paperless initiatives,” noted DeeDee Kato, VP of Corporate Marketing with Foxit. “Working together with them to build out the ROI clearly results in cost savings, improved efficiencies, and better customer responsiveness.”

In conclusion, the survey makes it clear that much progress has been made in recent years in the journey of healthcare organizations to transition to digital documents. Corporate inertia and other factors that have slowed institutions' full adoption of digital documents were upended by the 2020 pandemic. But concerns over high-profile data breaches and ransomware attacks against healthcare organizations illustrate the usefulness of keeping paper documents in the near term.

Foxit, a leading global provider of PDF solutions, has more than 650 million users worldwide and partnerships with Google, Amazon and Microsoft.