

## THIS MONTH: TRANSCRIPTION OUTSOURCING

**SUPPLIERS OF transcription services to consultants have been entering and exiting the market with regularity so a solid track record is perhaps the first consideration for anyone thinking of using them, writes Alison Ryan.**

Security is of paramount importance with regard to confidential patient data. It is best if the service is a provider with the NHS Information Authority code of connection or the equivalent with N3, the new national network for the NHS.

This ensures that encrypted data is sent over a secure connection to and from the client on an approved basis.

A provider should also be registered with the Information Commission. It regulates and enforces the Data Protection Act, the Freedom of Information Act, the Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations and the Environmental Information Regulations.

Simply emailing data will fall foul of data protection regula-

tion. Doctors using these services should also display what is known as an informed patient consent notice in their clinic, notifying the patients that their medical records may be processed outside the EU.

While specific consent is not actually required by the patient, this will ensure compliance with requirements of the Information Commissioner.

Service operates on three levels – turnaround, customer service and accuracy. Twenty-four hours is standard from original upload and back to the client but some providers are quicker and can grant more urgent requests.

While a lot of transcription is done outside the European Union, the provider should at least have support staff based in the UK and provide immediate support by phone and email if necessary.

In terms of accuracy, 100 per cent should be achievable, with errors only occurring due to poor quality dictation or lack of clarity of names or address spelling. The

quality assurance model ISO 9001 is desirable but not essential. Correct certification and security really is the litmus test.

Simplicity of dictation and interface in a time-pressured industry is essential. The flexibility of digital recorders allied to their ability to compress files has seen them established as standard.

Finally, cost. In the UK, this ranges from £0.10 to £0.15 per line depending on the complexity of the transcription required. As with everything, be wary of charges that are very low as inevitably service levels and accuracy can be compromised.

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