

## THIS MONTH: PATIENT RECORDS

WITH THE advent of the controversial National Programme for IT, storage of patient records is set to become more sophisticated and this is a welcome development, writes Alison Ryan.

However, many consultants still transport paper copies of patient records in the boot of their cars and in the event of the car being stolen or broken into, the security and confidentiality of that personal data is seriously compromised.

Using password protection and modern technology, consolidated electronic records can be managed and held locally on laptops and PCs or accessed out of the office using broadband connectivity.

Key factors to consider with storing sensitive data are accessibility, security and data integrity.

Let's compare the two most common methods of maintaining

patient records with the advantages of remotely held data.

### Accessibility

- **Paper:** physical transport and storage issues, one copy available;
- **Local:** reliant on one computer;
- **Remote:** access from any internet-enabled computer, and multiple viewing options.

### Security

- **Paper:** can be misplaced/lost and there is a requirement for back-ups/copies;
- **Local:** risk of hardware failure and theft of computer;
- **Remote:** 120-bit security encryption (same level as banks) and multiple authorised users/viewers.

### Data integrity

- **Paper:** filing errors, damage and loss;

- **Local:** regular back-ups required and careful management;

- **Remote:** real-time back-ups and professionally managed and stored.

Security is key and there are a number of options for a private consultant to use, each with its own risk profile.

Ultimately, peace of mind, accessibility and trust are the deciding factors.

*Mrs Ryan is client relationship manager at private practice management specialist PHF. Phone 0870 190 9391 or view the website [www.phf.uk.com](http://www.phf.uk.com)*

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