

Fax Safe Havens – there has to be a better way!

The 'Safe Haven' policy in place throughout the NHS, aimed at providing safe and secure handling of confidential patient information, has been developed to make the best of a very difficult situation. Data protection is an increasingly important issue, particularly where patient-identifiable records are being transmitted from one location to another but staff are having to manage this risk across disparate and inherently insecure methods of delivery ranging from email and post to fax and telephony.

In relation to fax transmission, Safe Haven guidelines provide best-practice advice. A typical Safe Haven policy would include guidance such as:

- Fax machines should be located in secure staff areas, which are under supervision at all times.
- Patient-identifiable information should be sent by fax only when absolutely necessary.
- The fax number should be verified with the recipient, ideally already pre-programmed into the fax. If there is any doubt, do not send the document by fax transmission.
- The responsibility for the correct despatch of all fax messages is with the sender.
- Use a fax cover sheet clearly stating that the fax contains confidentiality statement, and always state the name of the recipient.
- It is good practice to seek confirmation that the fax has been received and obtain a copy of a report confirming that transmission was OK.
- If the recipient fax is not a safe haven, telephone the recipient or their representative to let them know you are going to send a fax containing patient-identifiable information or confidential information. Ask that they wait by the fax whilst you send the information and acknowledge receipt.

In addition; the physical location of Safe Haven equipment must be clearly identifiable, physically secure, i.e. a lockable room, and access should ideally be by one entry point so that access can be easily controlled, in practices the safe haven would be located where patient records are stored. (Source: NHS West Essex Safe Haven Policy)

Clearly, although essential, the above guidance is extremely onerous to staff and acts as an impediment to efficiency. Staff must go to the Safe Haven, spend time contacting the recipient, send the fax and wait for confirmation. Even if this process is completed without delays a



considerable time will be required to send each fax and receiving a fax will be just as time consuming. Each Safe Haven fax machine will require a separate land line and each will use a considerable amount of power while on standby and consumables when in use. Each fax machine will also require maintenance and support, possibly through a maintenance contract. No audit trail will exist to show what was sent and by whom, and fax information will stay outside of integrated communications networks. To make matters worse, the fax machine should be kept in a locked room or at least an area with restricted access which takes up valuable office space.

It isn't surprising therefore, that fax is often seen as an unwelcome relic from the past that has to be tolerated as it stubbornly refuses to die. In many NHS sites, fax remains outside of even the most sophisticated communications networks but retains its importance to the organisation because it is ubiquitous, easily accessible and more inherently secure than email or post – assuming, of course, that the safe haven process is adhered to.

There is, however, a better way. The installation of a fax server, such as Lane's Passport 4000, can transform this difficult to manage anomaly within the communications portfolio into a fully integrated, easy to manage, highly accessible and totally secure way of transmitting sensitive information.

The fax server centrally manages the sending and receiving of fax and messaging for the whole organisation, controlling access to and distribution of information according to rules set up within the administration console. Each authorised user has secure access to their own Personal Communications Centre (PCC) which controls their access rights and provides a complete audit trail of activity. In this way, each user, assuming they have the relevant permissions, becomes a Safe Haven with full desktop access for sending and receiving faxes and messages securely. As the PCC connects directly to the fax server, messages delivered to the Safe Haven desktop bypass the organisation's insecure email system so maintaining end-to-end security.

This means that all fax hardware and associated telephone lines can be removed throughout the organisation and no more consumables or maintenance contracts are needed resulting in significant ongoing savings. The energy savings alone can be considerable, reducing the organisation's carbon footprint and contributing towards sustainability targets. If Voice over IP is utilised within the organisation then further energy and cost savings can be achieved by virtualising the fax server, and consolidating voice, data and fax over a single IP network (see Lane's Fax over IP virtual tour for an interactive explanation of the potential benefits).



The healthcare sector throughout the world faces ever-increasing demands for data protection and confidentiality. Lane's experience in this market has given it a solid understanding of the importance of secure communications and document processing systems. Lane's Passport 4000 fax server is used in hundreds of healthcare providers worldwide. It addresses the complexities of the clinical regulatory environment through a robust and highly-scalable system capable of serving all sizes of hospitals, clinics and laboratories. It is fully HIPAA compliant for US users, and meets the requirements of both the Data Protection Act and NHS Caldicott Principles in the UK by providing seamless integration of fully-encrypted fax and email, with complete transaction transparency and accountability.

About Lane

Lane has been at the forefront of messaging communications for over 30 years and is now recognized internationally as a leader in fax integration across the financial, healthcare, manufacturing and transport industries. Based in the UK, US and Singapore, Lane has implemented systems across 50 countries and provided professional services in all time zones. Lane offers the very best solutions for integrating fax servers as a part of wider communications networks. Lane delivers fax and messaging systems across entire organizations and into consolidated data networks, across one site, many sites or across borders. Please visit www.lanetelecom.com for more information on Lane solutions