

# Why US Healthcare Needs Unified Solutions for Healthcare Communication

Modernizing fax and deploying Direct Secure Messaging to rapidly exchange critical patient information across the care continuum.



**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

The white paper highlights the persistence of traditional fax in the US healthcare industry despite technological advances. It delves into the reasons for its continued use and the security and compliance challenges this poses, emphasizing the need to protect sensitive patient data. It acknowledges the industry's shift towards more modern, secure, and cost-efficient communication methods, such as Direct Messaging. The paper advocates for a unified communication platform to modernize patient information exchange, which enhances productivity and interoperability, allowing healthcare organizations to select the most suitable information-sharing method.

# The Persistence of Traditional Fax: Evaluating Cost, Compliance, and Security.

The continued prevalence of traditional fax technology within the US healthcare sector is both intriguing and concerning. Traditional fax, considered antiquated by many, continues to play a pivotal role in the exchange of medical information.

Let's unravel the factors contributing to the enduring relevance of traditional fax in healthcare and underscore the opportunities organizations have to modernize how they exchange medical information.

## REASONS FOR TRADITIONAL FAX PERSISTENCE



### Perceived Reliability and Familiarity:

Many healthcare providers are comfortable with traditional fax machines because they are familiar and have been reliable for years. The, "if it isn't broken, don't fix it," mentality is strong, especially when dealing with sensitive information. There is a perception that newer digital alternatives might not be as reliable or could introduce complexity that disrupts established workflows.



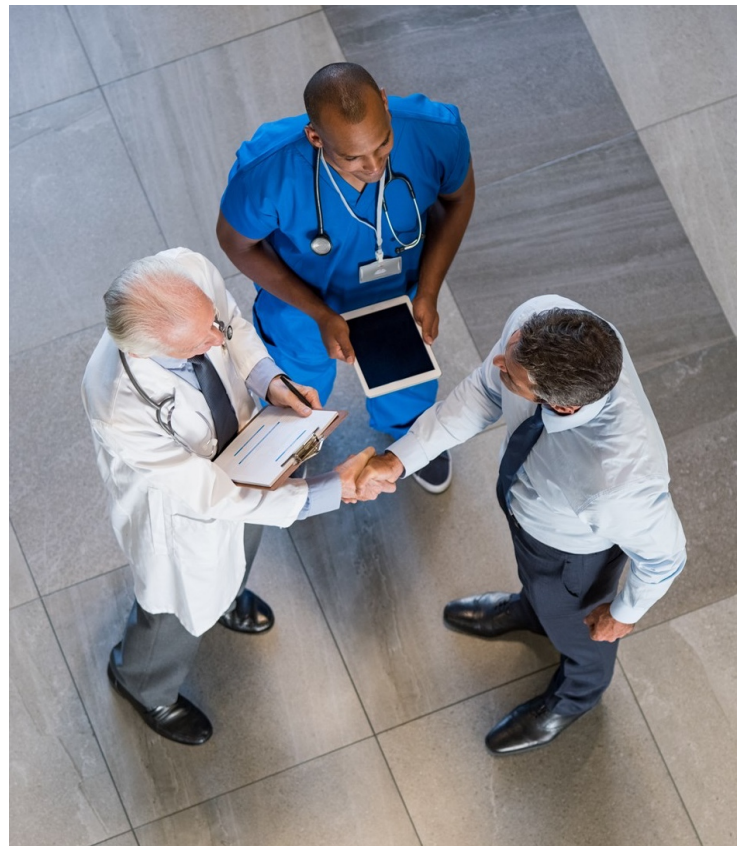
### Security Misperceptions:

There is a misbelief that traditional fax transmissions are inherently more secure than email or other forms of digital communication. While digital methods are in fact very secure with encryption and other trust-based measures ensure there are no bad actors, the use of traditional fax is sometimes falsely equated with security without a nuanced understanding of the risks and benefits of each method.



### Legal Acceptance:

Traditional faxes are still considered a legal form of document transmission, providing a physical paper trail that is often required for legal and billing purposes. This is reinforced by state and federal laws that sometimes lag behind technological advances and continue to specify faxed documents as a valid form of communication.



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## SECURITY AND COMPLIANCE CHALLENGES

The continued reliance on analog fax lines in healthcare introduces notable security and compliance concerns, such as:



**Data Breach Risks:** Documents sent through traditional fax can be intercepted or misdirected, exposing sensitive patient information to potential breaches. Unlike encrypted digital methods, traditional fax transmissions are susceptible to unauthorized access.



**Audit Trail Complexity:** Maintaining a comprehensive audit trail of documents sent through traditional fax can be cumbersome. This creates challenges in ensuring compliance with HIPAA and other regulatory requirements.



**Human Error:** Traditional faxing is prone to human error, such as misdialing, misplacing documents, or sending confidential information to the wrong recipient. These errors can have serious consequences for patient privacy.



**Obsolete Technology:** While perceived as secure, traditional fax technology is outdated, making it less efficient and reliable than modern digital communication methods.

The continued use of traditional fax in the US healthcare industry is a testament to the complexities and challenges inherent in the sector's transformation. While traditional fax serves as a functional bridge between legacy systems and modern healthcare practices, it raises serious security and compliance concerns.

To address these issues, healthcare organizations must prioritize the adoption of secure, interoperable, and digitally-driven communication methods. This transition should be accompanied by comprehensive training programs to ensure that staff can navigate these new technologies confidently and securely.

# Advancing Healthcare Communication: The Case for Direct Secure Messaging.

Direct Secure Messaging is an affordable, secure, and widely available technology to securely send protected health information between practitioners and organizations, including referrals, continuity of care documents (CCDs), and more. It is mandated for certified electronic health records (EHR) systems, yet many clinicians may not be aware that these capabilities exist and, many times, are already enabled in their system. Direct Secure Messaging is more versatile than traditional faxing but without the HIPAA concerns related to physical document handling or wrongly being intercepted. It is also easy to use, like sending an email — but much more secure.

Here are five reasons why Direct Secure Messaging is the preferred option when transmitting healthcare data to other clinicians and facilities:

## 1 ENHANCED WORKFLOWS

Using traditional fax necessitates collecting either physical or electronic documents and attaching them to a patient's medical record. Upon receiving the fax, data often requires re-entry into the appropriate forms or patient records, resulting in time-consuming tasks and the potential for errors. Direct Secure Messaging eliminates these challenges, saving staff time and enabling clinicians to make more precise treatment decisions.

## 2 IMPROVED SECURITY

Cloud fax in healthcare enhances security over traditional fax by using encrypted internet transmissions, reducing risks of data interception and unauthorized access, and allowing secure digital storage with controlled access. Direct Messaging in healthcare offers even greater security, with end-to-end encryption that ensures only intended recipients can decrypt data. It also features strict authentication protocols aligning with healthcare compliance standards, making it more secure than cloud fax for handling sensitive health information.

For primary care practitioners who encounter considerable administrative challenges associated with care transitions, referrals, and treatment plan approvals, the creation of Direct Addresses for specific functions like referrals or Admission, Discharge, Transfer (ADT) notifications, helps to securely redistribute administrative tasks to nursing and scheduling departments. This strategic allocation of responsibilities allows for a more secure and efficient workflow, freeing clinicians to concentrate on patient care with the assurance of data security.



# Advancing Healthcare Communication: The Case for Direct Messaging.

## 3 WIDESPREAD TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION

Direct Secure Messaging has long been an integral component of certified EHRs. While post-acute care providers did not receive the same incentives as hospitals and health systems to adopt EHRs, many post-acute care management systems now include Direct Secure Messaging functionality. With Direct Messaging, practitioners in skilled and long-term care settings can benefit from the same streamlined workflows available to acute and ambulatory care providers.

## 4 ACCESSIBLE DIRECTORY

Unlike traditional fax, organizations will be able to leverage a robust aggregate national directory, supporting practitioner, department and organization-level Direct Addresses, allowing both form and function based on specific workflow. This is further complemented by its robust security mechanisms, which ensures that recipient addresses have been ID-verified and deemed valid for PHI exchange.

## 5 PROMOTION OF INTEROPERABILITY

Ongoing federal efforts aim to connect practitioners across diverse clinicians, facilities, locations, and technologies, spanning the entire care continuum—a formidable challenge. Direct Secure Messaging provides affordable digital communication wherever possible, while uplifting healthcare organizations away from traditional fax to streamline adoption and progress towards a digital-first mentality.



# From Fax for Healthcare to Direct Messaging: The Case for Unified Solutions.

Health information exchanges (HIEs) were supposed to largely solve the EHR interoperability problem; they failed because interoperability standards varied from organization to organization. But the healthcare landscape is evolving rapidly, offering proven opportunities to all care providers.



## **INTEROPERABILITY: FROM CHALLENGES TO OPPORTUNITIES**

A challenge for interoperability between healthcare providers and others is that individual departments within a hospital can use disparate computer systems, creating in-house data siloes. For example, radiology may have a preferred suite of medical imaging software and services, while the cardiology department may opt for a separate system designed to meet their specific needs.

However, mandates for interoperability\*, such as the Trusted Exchange Framework and Common Agreement (TEFCA) and Qualified Health Information Networks (QHINs) represent significant opportunities for stakeholders in the US healthcare industry by establishing universal standards for health data exchange. These initiatives aim to create a more connected and efficient healthcare system where diverse entities, such as hospitals, clinics, and insurance companies can seamlessly share patient information. The result is a more holistic view of patient health, enabling better-informed clinical decisions, reducing redundant tests and procedures, and improving overall patient outcomes.

\* [Click here](#) for more information about mandates for interoperability.

## **THE VALUE OF UNIFIED SOLUTIONS**

Unified solutions that harmoniously integrate fax and Direct Messaging offer a strategic advantage. They bolster interoperability by allowing healthcare organizations to choose the most appropriate method for sharing patient information – for instance, sending both structured, and unstructured data, such as a scanned PDF, to a Direct Address.

Moreover, these unified solutions provide the invaluable capability of sending files directly to Electronic Health Records (EHRs). This integration not only accelerates data accessibility but also reduces the potential for errors associated with manual data entry.

# From Fax for Healthcare to Direct Messaging: The Case for Unified Solutions.



## BRIDGING THE GAP

Modernizing all forms of patient information exchange using a unified communication platform provides substantial productivity and interoperability benefits:

- All incoming patient records – whether received by fax or Direct Messaging - are available in a single unified intake queue, ensuring all incoming patient records are accessible and in place.
- Documents received by fax can easily be forwarded directly to the patient's chart in Direct-enabled EMRs or, using tools built into the cloud service, exported for streamlined import into any EMR.
- Analytics are maintained and available at any time to allow IT teams to track where most of their fax volume originates. Tools can be provided to invite healthcare partners to obtain Direct Addresses (at no charge). In this way, healthcare providers have the tools to quickly migrate the majority of their fax volume to Direct Messaging.



As healthcare organizations strive to deliver efficient and patientcentric care, the adoption of unified solutions emerges as a pivotal step toward modernizing communication while ensuring regulatory compliance.



# Success Story: Integrated Health System Modernizes Exchange of Patient Information.

## ABOUT THE CLIENT

The client is one of the largest municipal health systems in the nation – operating 26 health centers and four acute care hospitals. It cares for about 750,000 unique patients each year and employs over 23,000 staff.



## THE CHALLENGE

The challenge faced by this client mirrors a common scenario in healthcare: reliance on paper-based fax processes for both incoming and outgoing communications, resulting in:

- Higher number of errors
- Potential risk of protected health information (PHI) breach
- Substantial costs (with around 2,400 fax lines in use)
- Time-intensive operations.

To remain compliant, simply transitioning to electronic fax solutions was insufficient; the healthcare industry demands discrete document-type categorization for patients.

To tackle this effectively, it was essential to introduce a solution tailored for clinical document workflows.



## THE SOLUTION

The Kno2™-connected Xerox® Healthcare MFP Solution is an innovative printer solution specifically engineered for healthcare workflow demands. It is comprised of a Multifunction Printer (MFP) and the Kno2-connected, Xerox® Share Patient Information App. Through this Kno2 Connection, the solution comes together to help healthcare professionals seamlessly exchange both Fax & Direct Secure Messaging through Kno2, a HITrust-Certified, Designated QHIN.

The solution provides an on-ramp from the MFP to EHR systems, allowing clinicians and staff to securely share and store patient information digitally across the care continuum.



## THE RESULTS

The client asked for the lowest cost on its solicitation for hardware and onsite services to support its hospital systems and various clinics. As part of the solution, the client is implementing the Xerox® Healthcare MFP Solution with Kno2 and Knofy along with Xerox® Workplace Cloud to enable badge authentication at the device to meet the department's strict security requirements.

To improve the client's workflow, the team developed a proof of concept (POC) to demonstrate the benefits of taking fax paper out of its daily work stream and digitizing it. The department recognized it could significantly improve the way it shared, audited, routed, and scanned the fax pages directly into its electronic medical records (EMR) system, improving its overall efficiency and effectiveness. Designed specifically for healthcare, the solution allows authenticated users to securely share and store patient information digitally – either with secure Fax or with Direct Messaging – to improve the patient experience.

The initial configuration didn't include the critical electronic fax (e-fax) component, but Xerox and Kno2 expanded their partnership to include the e-fax services provided by a third-party fax vendor. The client benefits from a complete, unified solution – now and in the future. Xerox and Kno2 trailblazed a solution illustrating the value of Direct Messaging and unified communication for healthcare clients.



Learn more at [xerox.com/healthcareMFP](https://xerox.com/healthcareMFP)