The Paper Trail – Still in Healthcare

Most have known healthcare to be a document-intensive industry because of the paper trail of personal-patient information. Despite the widespread adoption of electronic health records (EHRs), it remains so today. A single sheet of paper is critical to a high quality of patient care. That piece of paper might be a clinical note about some key patient symptoms, or an order for an important diagnostic test. It might be a discharge summary to hand off to a patient at release. Or could be that piece of paper holds key medical billing codes that will help facilitate timely and accurate insurance payments.

No matter what that piece of paper may contain, there's no question that it plays a fundamental role in today's healthcare delivery system. To play that role:
- Documents travel from admissions to the patient's bedside
- To the nurse's station
- To the file room and back again

Given paper's inherent mobility, it is not always so easy for clinicians and administrators to track down that single sheet of paper—and the vital information on it—when they need it most. Even with electronic health records (EHRs), healthcare entities are still dealing with literally tons of paper each year. In a recent survey of healthcare organizations reported in *Information Week* magazine, three quarters of respondents stated that they had some form of EHR system implemented. Yet, despite that impressive rate of adoption, 80% of respondents reported they were still relying on paper records—including paper charts, physician notes, physician orders and registrations documents.

While some physicians and other clinical staff might view EHRs as somewhat of an intrusion, the tracking of the paper trail becomes increasingly imperative considering the power of just one piece of paper. There is the clinical note, the physician's order, the discharge summary and possibly more documents trailing behind. These documents have to be void of errors, the ability to prevent losses and at the same time, most importantly, improve patient welfare, safety and privacy.

Two years in to the goal of pushing the electronic medical record program, healthcare entities are realizing that paper will not be disappearing from the landscape any time soon. It takes time to roll out a comprehensive EHR system—and paper can be used to fill in important clinical decision gaps as systems are developed and implemented. But even once EHR systems are fully up and running, given the incredible amount of clinical information now required for each patient, clinicians still rely on paper for notes so that computer screens do not hamper the doctor/patient interaction.

How do successful organizations keep track of all that paper? OMG, LLC continues to stay up to date with the latest in records scanning and imaging industry and the resources available to help our clients find the best solution for their organization. If you would like to learn more please Call 513-429-9526 or e-mail at info@omgservices.com.