

1 Managing Electronic Social Care Records

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The high profile, critical legislation that surrounds the management of electronic social care records is equally applicable to both adult and child care services. It provides Records Managers with a timely opportunity to further raise their profiles and make a positive impact within their organisations by presenting their management with relatively straight forward and achievable solutions to what has the potential to be a complex issue.

This paper discusses the initiatives driving electronic social care records, related initiatives and the nature of the relationships.

It suggests that they can be managed by using existing electronic records management systems and describes some of the benefits that this approach can bring.

2 Introduction

Whilst we are all aware of the 2005 e-government targets as laid out in the 1999 white paper 'Modernising Government'ⁱ, and of the need to achieve Freedom of Information Actⁱⁱ compliance by 1st January 2005, within the public sector there are other major initiatives that require direction and input from, and arguably should be overseen by, Records Managers.

The Information for Social Care initiative, set up under the Social Care Quality Programmeⁱⁱⁱ provides a framework for improving quality in social care through the better use of information and information technology. The Information for Social Care document (pp11)^{iv} states that

"The development of the Electronic Social Care Record is crucial to the success of Information for Social Care. To meet the e-government targets, the ESCR should be operational by October 2004, with all new service user records being created in this form."

Within the National Health Service in England, the closely related National Programme for IT (NPfIT)^v is focused on the construction of new national information systems to provide significant improvement in the delivery of health care and services. This programme has four key deliverables:

- The provision of an underpinning IT infrastructure that is able to support both national and local systems,
- Electronic appointment booking,
- Electronic prescription transmission and
- An electronic care records service, known as the NHS CRS.

It is, perhaps, by having a sound understanding of these initiatives and robust solutions to put forward that Records Managers will be able to heighten

further their profile and professional standing and to make a positive impact on how these initiatives are implemented.

It should be recognised that some progress has been made, Information for Social Care (pp18) advises that:

“The Records Management Society of Great Britain has published comprehensive guidance on disposal policies in local government, which may provide a useful basis for local implementation.”

And whilst this recognition is encouraging, it should also be noted that this is the only reference to Records Management and Records Managers in the document, suggesting that there is still some way to go.

Information for Social Care (pp5) states that:

“The approach taken is to focus effort and provide encouragement to achieve information management improvements in five major areas, making this consistent with the e-government agenda:

- *Putting the citizen at the centre,*
- *Making information accessible in a form suitable and appropriate for all citizens,*
- *Identifying what information is required, and how best to manage it,*
- *Creating openness and accountability to give confidence in information collection and information sharing including work in collaboration with partner agencies, especially health,*
- *Supporting cultural change, so that information is seen as a valuable resource.”*

In essence, the electronic social care records initiative is concerned with:

- Bringing existing social care record keeping practice into an electronic environment.
- Applying existing national standards for managing social care records.
- Seeking congruence with NHS CRS and other e-government initiatives.

The points listed above, especially the first two, would suggest that the Records Manager is ideally placed to contribute to this initiative.

3 The relationship between NHS SCR and ESCR

The NHS SCR programme covers all aspects of information provision for the delivery of healthcare, including GP's, hospitals, health centres, hospices and social services.

There is a degree of overlap between NHS SCR and electronic social care records, with interactions between many of the same agencies, hence the desire for congruence expressed in Information for Social Care. This desire is further expressed in the NHS SCR Business Specification^{vi}.

It is anticipated by contributors to both programmes that these two separate initiatives will converge at some currently unknown time in the future.

4 What forms an electronic social care record?

The electronic social care record itself records referrals to health, education and social services. It also records those agencies referring on cases to each other and also to other agencies.

In addition to basic information about the service user, the records management system used must also record details of assessments, plans, objectives, actions and case work, through to case closure. These records provide a means to monitor the quality and progress of a practitioner's work with the service user.

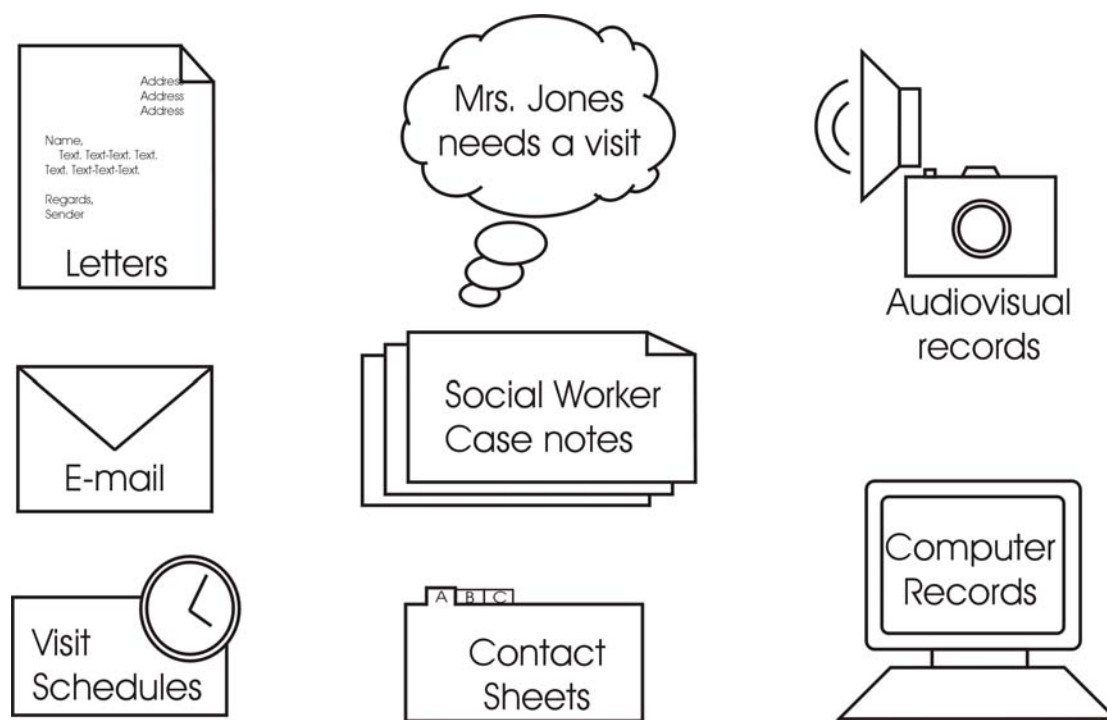


Figure 1. Component parts of an electronic social care record

An electronic social care record holds three broad categories of information^{vii}:

Coded data, as defined in Children's Social Services Core Information Requirements Version 3.1^{viii} and Adults 18 and Over Social Care Core Information Requirements^{ix}. This includes information such as name, address, carer details, marital status etc.

Structured information, which typically is made up of information recorded on forms, including nationally used forms (such as those for children's recording), local forms and forms that are completed by service users, such as self-referral or financial assessment forms. On many of the forms there will be coded data alongside the other information. For example, most forms have at least the name, address and date of birth of the service user.

Unstructured information covers all other recording, including that originating outside the agency. This includes letters, emails, records of phone calls (both written or taped), notes of meetings and potentially audio and video clips.

5 How can an electronic records management system help?

High quality social care is to a large extent dependent on the quality of the information available. According to Information for Social Care (pp8)

“If those services are to meet the needs and expectations of service users and to be delivered in a timely and cost effective way, then it is vital that appropriate information is available and accessible to the range of players with an interest in social services, from the general public and service users, through care workers and care providers to senior managers and elected members.”

Much of this information is, of course, to be found in records. The provision of effective and efficient Records Management is therefore of enormous benefit to fulfilling the objectives of Information for Social Care. An electronic records management system (ERMS) will improve the services provided to citizens by making those records more readily available. It can assist with assuring social care professionals that they have access to complete and high quality data, remove potential duplication from electronic social care record keeping activities and provide a single point of access to the electronic social care record itself.

A social care record is a statement of information known or believed at a point in time. An electronic records management system is able to present a view of the known information at a given point in time, providing authentic and reliable records. An electronic records management system can assure that the content and structure are unaltered and can provide context through a classification scheme.

Many organisations have implemented, or are in the process of implementing, an electronic records management system that could facilitate the management of electronic social care records. Indeed, the Information for Social Care Framework recommends that the management of electronic social care records should use an electronic records management system that complies with the National Archives Functional Requirements 2^x.

5.1 Security

Any discussion regarding security and security controls for electronic social care records must be aligned to those defined for Caldicott^{xi}. Defining the Electronic Social Record (pp59) provides a good flow diagram detailing access to electronic social care records.

An electronic records management system is able to provide good security for electronic social care records, often superior to equivalents within the paper world, where security can often solely consist of a locked cabinet.

Security can be assigned through levels, such as Classified, Restricted, Secret or Top Secret, providing a hierarchical security model, but also through caveats, such as Mental Health or Children’s Services. This provides an additional dimension of security, forming a security matrix model.

For example, any user of the system must have a sufficiently high security level, but also the applicable caveat to view a record, or group of records. In practise, a user might have a security level of Top Secret, say for example the Finance Director. This would allow them to view all records with a security level of Top Secret or below, regardless of whether they were records concerning finance, personnel or a service user. This is clearly a weakness. By applying a caveat to, for instance, Children’s Services records, that user would also need to have the applicable caveat to view those records. This is represented by the shaded area in the diagram below.

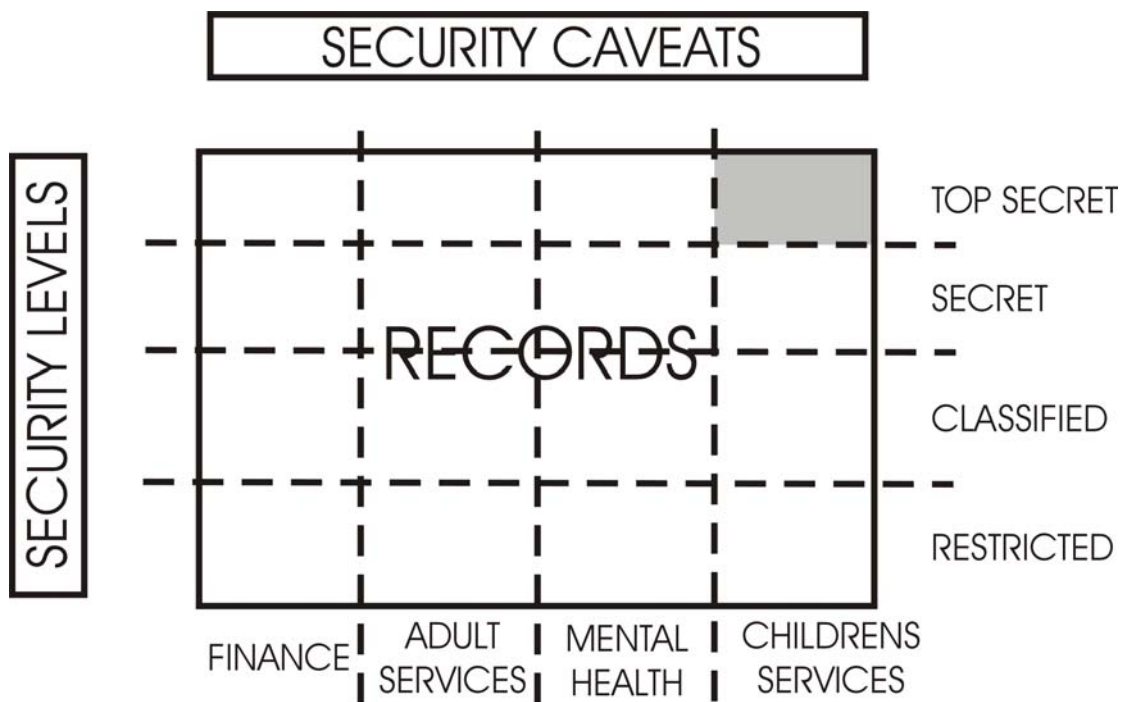


Figure 2. Security matrix

Many electronic records management systems can apply security through the classification scheme, record or document types or to individual records as appropriate.

Security models should not be designed so that they are overly elaborate. A simple security is easier to administer, but does require some policing. Perhaps more crucially openness is imperative.

Groups can be set up with those who have a legitimate relationship with the service user, i.e. a GP, social worker or support providers such as home care. The creation of groups is also a benefit in that it makes administration of the electronic records management system easier to perform, the group can have

its roles and rights amended, and that amendment will cascade down to the individuals within it.

Unauthorised attempts at access can be monitored, logged and reported. Most electronic records management systems have the functionality to be able to detect if a record has been altered in any way. Many systems can also be set up so that records and the audit logs recording what happens to the records cannot be tampered with, and then this tampering hidden through a deletion in the log itself. Indeed, ideally the system should be set up in such a way that no person, whatever their level, can commit a fraudulent act undetected.

Backups provide better security than one paper copy, but at the same time also raise issues around the destruction of records at the end of their retention period. All copies of the electronic record must be identified and appropriately disposed, including those on backups.

5.2 Classification

An electronic records management system is able to provide a classification plan, sometimes referred to as a file plan. Records Managers are now in broad agreement that a file plan based on the functions, activities and transactions of the organisation, known as a FAT analysis, is the optimal method for classifying records. For more information, refer to the DIRKS manual^{xii} or ISO 15 489^{xiii}. Records are generally placed into a folder at the transaction level of the hierarchy, often referred to as the subject. So in the example classification plan shown below, a folder within Contact Record could be named after the service user. Information for Social Care (pp19) suggests a number of processes that lend themselves to a classification plan:

- Enquiries or contacts,
- Referrals,
- Assessments,
- Care plans,
- Service provision,
- Reviews.

These processes would seem to fit at the activity level within the classification plan.

The document also describes un-indexed documents but it does not specify how these should be dealt with. An electronic records management system will provide a number of solutions to ensure that unindexed documents can be found, e.g. by a full text search.

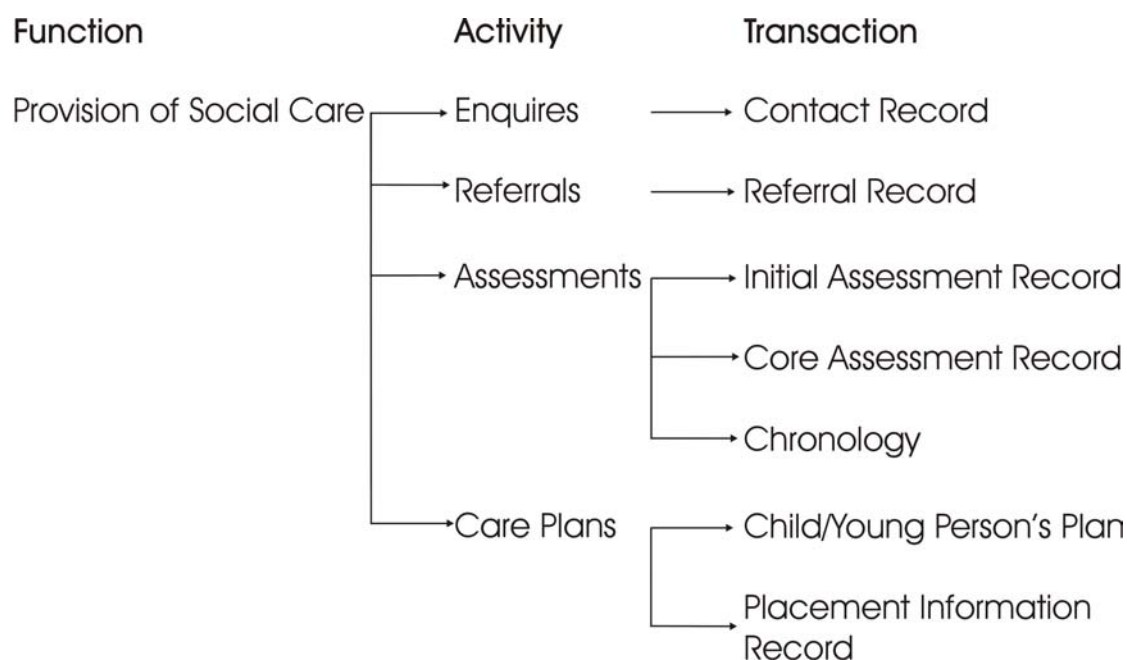


Figure 3. Sample Classification Plan

By placing a record into the classification plan, that record can inherit the security levels and caveats and retention requirements from the plan itself.

5.3 Document types

Defining the Electronic Social Record (pp19) lists three document types:

- Agreed national documents,
- Possible national documents and
- Local documents.

An electronic records management system should support document types, as they are a key requirement for electronic social care records management.

Information for Social Care (pp21) and Defining the Electronic Social Care Record (pp21) suggest that metadata elements such as security and retention are applied according to document type. As discussed earlier, an electronic records management system should allow these metadata elements to be applied either through the classification plan or through the document type.

Either method enforces rules governing security and the retention and disposal of records whilst removing these decisions from the user.

5.4 Accessibility and availability

For self-evident reasons, physical records are not easily shared among social care agencies. Paper records can only be in one place at one time, which often leads to multiple copies of records being kept, which in turn can lead to people keeping 'their own' records. This strategy is risky, information is seen as belonging to the individual and not the organisation and furthermore does

not easily allow for the destruction of records that have reached the end of their retention period. It also weakens security.

An electronic records management system allows important information to be shared between individuals and agencies, as long as the security requirements are fulfilled. Several people are able to access the record at the same time, so a clinician and social worker are able to work together to support a service user. This has the potential to enhance the integration and co-ordination of multi-professional and multi agency social care. Furthermore, the need to physically send records, by post, courier, etc will be eliminated, speeding up the social care process.

Electronic records can be accessed from remote locations (i.e. the social worker does not have to be in the office to be able to access the record). Electronic social care records can also be available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, with obvious benefits.

Document scanning into an electronic records management system means that information previously only available in paper form is available from a secure, centralised electronic filing cabinet. Unlike paper records, as many people can see the social care records as need to, at the same time, again as long as security requirements are met. This allows parallel activities to take place, logically by-passing the critical path and avoiding bottlenecks.

For born digital records, most electronic records management systems also provide version control, so that only one copy of the record can be updated at a time to prevent divergence of content. This doesn't prevent multiple viewing, and team working, however.

5.5 Retrieval

Social care records that are in an electronic records management system can be retrieved easily. They can be searched by keywords, such as service user name, or by the actual content of the record. Most electronic records management systems include features to allow related records to be viewed.

The retrieval of electronic social care records is likely to be based on:

- The service user,
- The date,
- The source, or creator, of the record,
- Access or consent type,
- The document type as previously described or
- Media type.

Or a combination of the above. An electronic records management system should allow users to build these queries in a non-technical, easily understandable way.

5.6 Interoperability

As our society becomes increasingly mobile, service users are more likely to move from one authority area to another. Paper records must be physically transferred which is time consuming and, potentially, could delay the provision of care. An electronic records management system that meets the National Archives requirements will be e-gif^{xiv} compliant. This means that the records can be transferred electronically between authorities when the service user moves, providing a continuous and consistent service.

5.7 Workflow

The Workflow Management Coalition defines workflow as:

“Workflow is concerned with the automation of procedures where documents, information or tasks are passed between participants according to a defined set of rules to achieve, or contribute to, an overall business goal.”^{xv} (pp6).

With a workflow system, it is possible to set up processes that will notify care workers and other relevant people as the record moves through the system, tell the care worker where the process is at any given time and let them know when it is complete. There are any number of processes that can benefit from such automated processing.

Additionally, the automation of many business processes often leads to a streamlining and simplification, resulting in the elimination of unnecessary steps, which in turn leads to the improved management of business processes through standardising working methods.

5.8 Other benefits

Electronic social care records can come in many formats, from word processed documents, scanned images to audio and video files. An electronic records management system should be able to store all of these.

6 Preservation

Whilst no specific mention is made of preservation issues in the literature around electronic social care records, those issues are likely to be relevant. For example, the General Disposal Guidelines for Local Authorities (pp28) states that records involving case assessment, investigation, registration, and management of children involved in child protection be retained for 35 years after case closure. This length of retention of electronic records will necessitate that a preservation strategy be put in place.

This article does not intend to discuss all the issues that surround digital preservation. Indeed this requires an article (should that be a book?) in its own right. Whether emulation, as advocated by Rothenberg^{xvi}, or migration as advocated by Bearman^{xvii}, or conversion to a standard format (as argued against by both) turns out to be the solution, perhaps only time will tell.

However, it would seem clear that records in a managed system, such as an electronic records management system, are easier to administer in terms of preservation than records that are not in a managed system. For instance,

the records will be protected against alteration and they can be moved en masse to new physical media prior to obsolescence.

7 Other options

Whilst the Information for Social Care document also discusses the potential for integrating existing information systems, there are disadvantages to this approach in comparison to using an electronic records management system.

- It could be said that there has been a general move away from systems internally developed towards systems that are able to handle many different types of content and format, the very word processed documents, emails and video and audio clips that make up an electronic social care record.
- Integrated systems will not always provide a single point of entry to access the records. The care worker has to search across various systems, all of which they must be trained to use.
- People are comfortable with documents as a method of communication. A document based system is easier for both citizens and authority staff to understand. This means it is easier to train authority staff to use the system and is also likely to generate less resistance.
- It is generally easier, and therefore cheaper, to make changes to an electronic records management system than to a database driven integrated information system. These changes are quicker to introduce, ensuring that the organisation is able to react quickly to changes in working practices or legislation.
- And of course, implementing a commercial of the shelf product that requires little or no technical or programming skill will incur lower costs than development heavy project.

In summary, the electronic records management approach keeps it simple, accessible to users and affordable, while providing appropriate security controls.

8 Summary

Electronic social care records are high on the agenda of many local government authorities. There are a number of ways in which they can be dealt with and Records Managers have the skills and knowledge necessary to bring about the changes required to meet the targets and objectives set. As a profession, Records Managers must seize these initiatives to ensure that they are implemented in such a way as to comply with best practise in records management and to ensure that service users see real improvements in the quality of care they receive. And of course, if this simultaneously raises the profile of the profession, that can only be a good thing.

9 About Audata

Founded in 1998, Audata Ltd. is an Information and Records Management consultancy working at strategic and practical levels. Audata specialises in the interface between electronic and paper records, providing services to both local and international clients.

Audata is able to advise on and implement electronic document and records management systems, data storage and customised software and database solutions. Audata has developed strategies and practical projects for digital preservation.

Audata is able to supply and implement practical biometric solutions to support Information Management and improve workflow. These products can be installed on current IT systems to streamline business processes.

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Links accurate at 10 Feb 2004

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