

More than meets the eye

Nicola Strickland, consultant radiologist, Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust, on why a national digital teaching library would be much more than a simple collection of images.

Sometimes you don't realise what you have until it is gone. Such is the case with the film-based teaching collections that used to be used commonly by radiologists before the proliferation of picture archiving and communication systems (PACS).

In the days of film-based imaging, most radiologists simply kept a cupboard full of interesting imaging cases and would pull them out to teach junior radiologists, or when they required a good example of a particular condition for publication, or to use as a slide. The

virtually any clinical situation as they educate junior radiologists or for personal study and self improvement.

Because so many imaging studies would be available, the digital library would also become a more valuable resource for trainee and qualified radiologists alike, who could expand their understanding of specific imaging sub-specialties by tapping into their peers' large collection of good cases. The need for these advanced digital teaching collections is likely to increase because it is expected that radiologists in the UK

Additions to the digital library must be easily performed during routine reporting (as a "drag and drop" manoeuvre, preferably in conjunction with speech recognition to add text) as part of the normal workflow. If radiologists were required to write out a list of names while sitting at the PACS reporting monitors, and then move to a personal computer to contribute images to the digital library, the inconvenience would probably deter them from using it.

The software

Sophisticated software is needed to transform the library from merely a collection of digital studies dumped in a single file into a useful flexible package for radiologists and other clinicians.

McKesson's Horizon Study Share™ is an example of a commercially available system that could be used to provide such a digital resource. It is a web-based solution, which enables radiologists to efficiently organise and share images and reference case information as a hierarchical library. Its functionality includes:

- easy certification of submitted cases
- an infinite hierarchy of cases in personally customised folders
- anonymous cases with access controls. ■

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overwhelming majority of hospitals in the UK have PACS installed – and the radiologists and other clinicians are enjoying all the associated clinical and operational benefits. Unfortunately, when it is time to pull out an interesting case for teaching purposes, the cupboard is bare.

The solution

A national digital teaching library would contain a collection of interesting imaging studies contributed by radiologists from across the UK. Such a library would not only replace the personal film collections, but could surpass their value by offering a host of additional advantages.

Most importantly, such a library would contain images contributed by many radiologists with varied experiences. Thus the library would provide radiologists with the breadth and depth of imaging studies needed to address

will be required to revalidate their credentials every few years, and to prove their continuing professional competence.

In addition, with a robust digital library, the quality of teaching would far surpass that accomplished with small film-based personal libraries. For example, radiologists might have thought that they had a great imaging study to illustrate pancreatic cancer but then discover that another study in the library is actually a better example.

The hurdles

The evolution of this national digital library presents some challenges. Most importantly, all of the PACS in the UK need to connect to the same digital library. In addition, the library would have to function in a way that allows radiologists to contribute and review teaching cases directly from their diagnostic PACS monitors.

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