

Managing the Flow in Radiology

There's always room for a new radiology information system (RIS), especially when it has been developed based on the input of radiologists. CoActiv LLC, Ridgefield, Conn, just launched its EXAM-RIS, the company's new Web-based, PACS-integrated RIS product. EXAM-RIS boasts an array of features to support complete electronic workflow, including single- and multi-site scheduling, charting, and document scanning.



"Our RIS was developed the same way our PACS was developed," explained CoActiv CEO Ed Heere. "We were providing IT support to a number of multisite radiology businesses, and they were less than happy about their RIS/PACS situation. We learned what everybody does and doesn't do, and asked what the radiologists liked and what they hated."

Likes included the capability to support multiple sites from a RIS for dayhawking and remote reading, an incorporated dictation/transcription system, both individual and group worklists, and single-button loading. "We took an existing client of ours who's had a RIS for a number of years and went through the question-and-answer period with him," Heere said. "He had a high level of dissatisfaction with his current RIS, both its performance and the support."

The CoActiv team incorporated the client's requests into its RIS system, then added some new ideas. "We're very fast," Heere noted. "The RIS is based on innovative database products. We also give them the option of hosting the server at their place or in our data center, which has a high amount of bandwidth; they don't have to tie up their own bandwidth with it. We offer the same option on our PACS, allowing users to have a completely virtual RIS/PACS system."

Another important factor is service to referring physicians. "Radiology practices have a lot of demands from their referring physicians," Heere said. "They depend on them for their business. With EXAM-RIS, referring doctors can request a time slot for a particular exam within the system. Then their office can check the progress—has the patient arrived yet, has the exam been performed, is the report done. Once it's done, it's available online."

At the 2008 meeting of the Health Information and Management Systems Society, CoActiv debuted its paperless PACS; the new RIS is paperless as well. "Radiologists don't want any paper whatsoever," Heere noted. "That's especially important when you're reading remotely."

Additional features include customizable reports and the ability to open an exam from either the RIS or the PACS. "We're great believers that an imaging center should be RIS-driven," Heere said. "The RIS carries all the historical information about the patient; that should be the driving force. But some radiologists like the worklist that's available from within the PACS system, so we allow it to be configured either way." Pricing is available on either a capital or a per-exam basis.

Finally, Heere said, the EXAM-RIS is designed to facilitate easy adaptation to future EMR systems. "Our intention is to sell this as a completely integrated product that we can then integrate into the larger EMR systems out there," he said. "That's what the next step will be in this industry. Once there's a national health record, we'll be asked to drop our reports into the system, and we'll be prepared for that."

—Cat Vasko