

The Medical University of South Carolina Makes Shift to a Virtual Workplace Easier with Digitized HR Records

Remote Work During Pandemic Required Anytime-Anywhere Access to HR Files

To help stem the spread of COVID-19, many hospitals—like other employers across the country—quickly shifted to remote work locations for non-clinical staff when the state of emergency began. Most had to adjust with little prep time while continuing to conduct business as usual. And for staff who worked in departments that relied heavily on paper files stacked in filing cabinets back at the office, working from home wasn't always efficient or possible.

For the Medical University of South Carolina Hospital (MUSC), a decision made months ago to digitize workforce records made remote work much easier for the human resources staff, according to HR Operations Manager Latonia Allen.

"At the beginning of the pandemic, all of our staff began to work remotely, and for the most part, we are still remote," Allen said. "Being able to access records from anywhere was very important because HR Operations was still working at a maximum capacity, but with limited resources due to layoffs. Many businesses were open, people were still buying houses, and we were getting requests for employment verification, information for banking purposes, benefits information, processing new hires, and so on."

As MUSC had grown and acquired new facilities, it also had acquired thousands of paper documents on active and inactive employees, many well beyond their required retention dates. The paper records weren't easily searchable, couldn't have been replaced if damaged, and could easily be misfiled. Digitizing all of those documents was more than the HR staff could handle efficiently, so the Department retained Docufree to handle the backlog.

Docufree's Document-Management Services Aid MUSC with Digitization Project

With more than 45 years of experience in document management, Docufree had the resources and expertise MUSC needed to turn what would've been an enormous task for staff into a roughly two-month project. Docufree boxed up the records and took them to its high-security facility in Pineville, N.C., where the team logged, tagged, prepped and scanned the documents that needed to be retained and destroyed the ones that didn't.

The project allowed MUSC to catch up, regain valuable office space, and deploy staff to more productive work. And it better prepared the HR Department for the unplanned shift to having staff work from home.

"At the time Docufree picked up the documents, there were some files we were not able to send because we were having a benefits event, so we asked them to come back and catch us up," Allen said.

"Also, because of the pandemic, we had some staff layoffs, so we were a little overwhelmed at the beginning. Docufree wasn't shut down, and they were able to respond."

MUSC is continually growing to improve access to healthcare, Allen said, recently adding hospitals in the locations of Lancaster, Chester, Marion and Florence throughout the state. "I have put Docufree in touch with the directors at those locations so that they can do a quote and we can get started with digitizing all those records," she added.

Docufree has worked with thousands of hospitals to secure millions of medical records, including HR files, patient records, credentials and other mission-critical documents. The company has helped hospitals become paperless so that they can improve the patient experience, gain staff efficiencies, and mitigate risk.

Bulk digital scanning is one of numerous services offered by Docufree. The company can also scan microfilm and microfiche so that all records are searchable in the same digital format.

The process starts with a pilot or proof of concept using one or two boxes of files to confirm that the finished scanned data meets the client's expectations and can be integrated into the hospital's information system. From there, the client can opt for on-site scanning or turn everything over to the Docufree team.

“At the beginning of the pandemic, all of our staff began to work remotely, and for the most part, we are still remote. Being able to access records from anywhere was very important because HR Operations was still working at a maximum capacity with limited resources due to layoffs. Many businesses were open, people were still buying houses, and we were getting requests for employment verification, information for banking purposes, benefits information, processing new hires, and so on. The decision to digitize workforce records made remote work much easier.”

- *Latonia Allen, MUSC's HR Operations Manager*

“We touch every page of every record, tag each file and determine what can be shredded securely and what needs to be scanned, and we create a complete disposition manifest,” said Docufree Account Manager Richard Ouzts, “This creates documentation needed for HIPAA compliance and assures the client every record is accounted for and tracked throughout the process.”

Docufree prides itself on having meticulous full-time staff members who are incentivized to provide 100-percent accuracy.

MUSC Builds and Maintains Productive Virtual Work Environment

At the end of the process, files are accessible to anyone who has the user rights from their desktop. Document retrieval time drops from days to seconds, and there is no need to worry about a document getting misplaced or misfiled. And in the event of a disaster, the backed-up files can be recreated.

If there's a silver lining in the pandemic cloud, it may be that businesses and hospitals have learned that employees can be productive in a virtual work environment with the right technological support. As a result, many may continue to follow remote or hybrid work schedules for the foreseeable future.

And there's one additional silver lining for MUSC: When the HR Department moves to a new office location, the staff won't have to haul a bunch of file cabinets with them.