

Electronic Record Keeping



Points for COSCA Member Organisations and Individual Members to Consider

The following guidance as such relates to best practice where Electronic Record Keeping is in use either by COSCA member organisations or individual COSCA members in private practice.

Please note that there is presently no legal requirement that therapists keep records, which includes **Electronic Record Keeping**, of their client work- *'There is no legal requirement that all therapists keep records of all their client work' (Bond, T. & Mitchels, B. 2008).*

COSCA Recognised Organisations should see their updated Recognition Scheme Handbook for further guidance on specific scheme requirements relating to Electronic Record Keeping or contact the Recognition Scheme Development Officer on the above details.

1. Electronic Records are those records that are generated with and used by information technology devices. Electronic Records for instance may include the following: client records, emails, scanned documents containing data on clients and any data relating to clients stored within Mobile Telephones such as client telephone numbers, and text messages. Paper records may be converted to Electronic Records utilising tools such as Scanners, or through similar technology on Mobile Telephones.
2. Data on clients held on a computer (or in other electronic forms such as a personal organiser, Mobile Telephones, personal digital assistant etc) should be made secure from access by others, either directly from the computer terminal, or from a modem, cable network or other means of access by the use of secure passwords, data encryption, 'firewalls' or similar means of securing the site or device.
3. Due consideration should be taken as to whom is designated 'permission' within the organisation to access Electronic Records and as to whom has responsibility regarding their maintenance and protection. Those responsible for the protection of Electronic Records should be alert and responsive to current privacy, data protection and identify theft issues as they occur.

4. Careful consideration should be taken into any professional transitions which may occur, such as employees with designated authority and responsibility for access to electronic record keeping systems leaving the organisation, and the potential for any disruption of access to said systems. A contingency plan should ensure that access to electronic records is possible by a suitable employee(s) in the absence of any designated individual with access to electronic records.
5. Counsellors accessing electronic records at home or in other places outwith the premise in which they practice should ensure that electronic records are not visible to others at all times.
6. Counsellors holding electronic records containing client data on their personal computers or any other digital aids should ensure that said devices are sent for any repairs from reputable sources only to minimise the risk of data corruption.
7. Where an electronic record system is used the system must be reputable and fit for purpose. Due consideration should be given to the information and business needs of the service both in the short and longer term and any statutory or legislative demands relating to your organisation. Examples of Electronic Record Keeping systems that COSCA are aware of include Carista, CoreNet and Sincharta; costings vary across these systems: *(Please note that COSCA accepts no liability in respect of the systems provided by the organisations below)* :
 - Sincharta- www.sinchartaweb.com offers a system for storing client notes and other data with secure and protected encryption for all your files.
 - Carista- www.carista.co.uk is an integrated information management system created for social care which enables your organisation to centralise data and manage the support you provide, in one place.
 - CoreNet- www.coreims.co.uk is a secure web based system which allows your organisation to collect client reported outcome measures and to use this information to manage therapeutic outcomes.
8. Where Electronic Records are used careful consideration should be taken regarding any preservation challenges or access and retrieval issues which might occur due to system failure or storage capacity issues with a contingency plan in place.
9. Organisations may chose to operate Electronic Record Keeping and paper systems concurrently hence it is important to establish how these systems will work together.

10. Whilst there are there are no specific legal recommendations for the period of time to keep client records, a substantial number of organisations recommend that all records be kept for a period of six years (plus one additional 'safety' year) after the last contact with a client, which should be considered with regards to Electronic Record keeping also. A different record system again may need to be considered for records that apply to children. As per paper records where appropriate Electronic records should be disposed of to prevent improper disclosure of information.

11. Clients must be informed during initial contracting that their records are being stored electronically stored and that they have the right to request access to information stored on them.

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