

Four Prescriptions for a Healthy Disaster Recovery Plan

Neil deGrasse Tyson, American astrophysicist, author and science communicator once said: “Even with all our technology and the inventions that make modern life so much easier than it once was, it takes just one big natural disaster to wipe all that away and remind us that, here on Earth, we’re still at the mercy of nature.” His observation has become especially relevant in healthcare as organizations have adopted electronic medical records - and other clinical technologies - en masse to improve patient care delivery. What’s more, man-made disasters emanating from user error, cyberattacks and ransomware are on the rise.

The fact that most organizations now rely on electronic systems adds more complexity to these intrinsically difficult situations. “In the past, organizations would primarily fall back on paper processes when a disaster struck. Organizations don’t have the capability to do that anymore,” said Bryan Matsinger, national healthcare sales, Sungard Availability Services (Sungard AS). “In many instances, clinicians have never used paper processes at all or have not used them in the recent past, so to expect them to pick up and start using paper processes is just not practical. And, because of the complexities of these environments, it’s just not realistic.”

In addition, with many healthcare organizations now offering IT services and support outside of their own four walls, the impact of a disaster is often felt far beyond the eye of the storm. “With so many mergers and acquisitions, organizations that just supported their immediate community are now expanding into other areas, other parts of the country and, in some cases, around the world,” he said. “When you start supporting people globally, the need for systems to be running around the clock becomes even more critical.”

Indeed, if a healthcare provider is experiencing a technology outage due to a local weather-related incident, local patients are likely to accept the situation. However, “when you’re supporting an organization half way around the world, the staff and patients there are not as likely to be as tolerant,” Matsinger explained.

With IT supporting care delivery on such a grand scale, Disaster Recovery (DR) has become a pressing issue. As such, organizations are looking to implement DR programs that will enable them to continually provide patient care 24 x 7. While doing so, these organizations are coping with a variety of challenges:

CHALLENGE 1: Providing continuous application availability

With the increasing reliance on technology, healthcare organizations need DR programs that enable their access to applications around the clock, even when disasters strike. “It comes back to this whole idea of healthcare at the speed of now, which means that patients, who are now acting as consumers, are asking for 24/7 access to their patient information,” said Terry Humphrey, healthcare business director at EMC.

Although many EMR vendors offer DR capabilities to support their specific applications, today’s complex IT environments require much more. Health IT leaders need to consider the recovery of the many applications upon which EMR systems are dependent. “If I’m a physician and I’m trying to get up-to-the-minute, real-time information, I’m going to log into my EMR. In a 500 bed hospital,

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*Bryan Matsinger
National Healthcare
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there could be 400 other applications that are feeding critical data into the EMR. All of these apps and servers targeted toward the EMR need to present real-time, relevant data,” said Jeff Worley, director of national healthcare channel sales, Sungard AS.

As such, DR plans need to stretch beyond simply protecting native EMR data. “An EMR on its own without all the other applications and partner feeds diminishes in value,” Matsinger said. “Healthcare organizations need to consider the entire ecosystem of applications for the continuous care of their patients.”

Healthcare organizations need solutions that help them access all available information across the continuum of care to enable safer patient care delivery and outcomes. “Organizations need world-class technologies that are able to manage data mobility and availability at any site that may need to become production, in the event of disaster,” Humphrey pointed out. To help support this strategy, redundant environments can be developed by leveraging advanced recovery services, colocation, and managed recovery-as-a-service solutions (see Chart 1).

CHART 1

Solution: Managed Recovery-as-a-Service (RaaS)

Value for Healthcare Providers	Benefits
Service level agreement (SLA)-driven business continuity and DR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design and implement business continuity environments with dedicated redundant environments • Architect a plan that helps organizations better comply with regulations and meet budgetary goals • Align requirements with data recovery SLAs
Support for EMR and non-EMR applications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide business continuity for overall healthcare operations, not just limited to the EMR
Local DR, regional DR and 3rd site DR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable access to business continuity/DR at healthcare provider data centers or Sungard AS data centers

CHALLENGE 2: Resuming mission-critical operations through automation

Invariably, the goal – after a disaster strikes – is to quickly return to normalcy. A managed recovery and workplace recovery program should automate recovery as much as possible (see Chart 2). However, such automation needs to be continuously reviewed and tested – as information systems are continually evolving. In addition, staff members need to know what to do when calamity strikes. “You want to make sure your people and your resources are in the right place at the right time,” Humphrey said.

CHART 2

Solution: Managed Recovery Program and Workplace Recovery

Value for Healthcare Providers	Benefits
A fully tested and documented DR plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuously update and test DR plans to ensure a successful DR strategy • Build DR plan based on best practices • Capture and update system changes using automated tools and DR experts to help ensure a “gapless” DR strategy
Prioritization of business processes, determining the recovery requirement, identifying the critical applications and testing/supporting the recovery processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows healthcare provider to focus on providing healthcare services and patient care, not DR planning • Provides a real-world recovery plan that incorporates a tested process, proven system resiliency and the expertise of the people supporting it • Provides outsourced IT resources with technology and healthcare expertise
A recovery plan that takes staff resources into account	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sungard AS Workplace Recovery is available to work onsite at healthcare provider’s location, if needed

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Channel Sales
Sungard AS

CHALLENGE 3: Simplifying the management of complex healthcare IT environments

To deliver optimum patient care, healthcare providers typically need to run hundreds of applications on a variety of platforms. Not surprisingly, many organizations now possess a technically diverse mixture of old and new, in-house and outsourced IT systems, making simplicity somewhat elusive creating added complexity in the wake of a disaster.

“Certainly if things are simple, then when there is some sort of outage, it’s going to be a lot easier to get that environment back up and running and operational. Healthcare organizations and the application vendors have already provided standards and moved toward simplifying this,” Matsinger said. “However, they still have a long way to go.”

Sticking to the strategic plan can help. “As new systems and applications are being deployed, organizational leaders need to look at how they fit into the strategic direction of the healthcare IT group,” he said. “Doing so will not only help organizations minimize complexity but also establish standards that will better equip them to respond to outages.”

In addition, automating routine tasks can help to simplify application management. Perhaps most important, hybrid IT services can make simplification possible, as a hosted private cloud could be customized with different components and configuration options (see Chart 3). “EMC, working with Sungard AS, implements a software-defined hybrid infrastructure where automation is key. You don’t need to dedicate your staff to implement updates or changes, or to support provisioning or deployment,” Humphrey said. “As such, healthcare organizations can then refocus their staff on delivering innovation and the clinical projects that support the overall business mission.”

CHART 3	
Solution: Hybrid IT Services	
Value for Healthcare Providers	Benefits
Provides broad IT services coverage throughout the IT stack	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on strategic priorities rather than managing the daily operations of the increasingly complex hybrid IT • Leverage single provider for various managed services • Switch to OPEX versus CAPEX IT model based on Sungard AS services

CHALLENGE 4: Preparing, achieving and maintaining IT compliance while carrying out strategic initiatives

With a variety of strategic imperatives on their agendas, health IT leaders are facing more pressure than ever to move their organizations forward, while still maintaining compliance with regulations from HITECH to HIPAA to ISO and much more (see sidebar “Government Mandates for Disaster Recovery”).

Enlisting the help of a third party when working to achieve DR compliance enables organizations to key in on other priorities (see Chart 4). “If your organization receives Medicare, Medicaid or any federal funding for electronic medical records, you’re mandated by the federal government to have a documented, tested business plan,” Worley said. “Sungard Availability Services provides the overall audit, the tests and the full documentation to achieve the business continuity that’s expected by the government today so your organization can focus on other strategic initiatives.”

In addition, through the use of RSA Security Solutions for identity and access management, healthcare organizations can leverage a trusted IT infrastructure to help comply with patient privacy and security regulations. “There’s security and protection services wrapped around all of the information - whether that be encryption of some other tool that’s monitoring who has access to the systems,” Humphrey said.

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Healthcare Business
Director
EMC

GOVERNMENT MANDATES FOR DISASTER RECOVERY

Government initiatives are prompting healthcare organizations to zero in on their DR efforts. To comply with HIPAA, HITECH, and EU Data Protection Directives, healthcare organizations must implement DR programs that enable them to effectively recover electronic patient health information. In addition, organizations are required to provide patients with an electronic copy of their record upon request and enable them to access and download their record online within four business days of it being available.

Natural disasters, user error, cyber-attacks and most recently the proliferation of ransomware attacks all make healthcare data particularly vulnerable. Working with Sungard AS and EMC, however, can help healthcare organizations overcome the challenges associated with providing valuable patient information to the right clinician at the time that it is needed.

CHART 4

Solution: Sungard AS IT Consulting Services

Value for Healthcare Providers	Benefits
Expertise on a wide range of compliance programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Carry out strategic business priorities while keeping up with complex regulations• Implement and maintain business continuity and DR plans that comply with the latest healthcare regulations

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| Bryan Matsinger

¹ Search HealthIT. Disaster Recovery Plan. <http://searchhealthit.techtarget.com/definition/HIPAA-disaster-recovery-plan>



About Sungard Availability Services and EMC

Sungard Availability Services and EMC partner with your organization to provide a trusted Healthcare IT infrastructure to help ensure your environment is always on and always available and to deliver safer, patient care. We are committed to providing solutions that are responsive to the changing healthcare environment and work with your EMR, clinical, and business applications to enable regulatory compliance standards and ensure business continuity over distance. Our solutions provide a clear return on investment with proven capabilities, including continuous real-time data access, ability to meet business and clinical SLAs, and quantified recovery time and recovery point objectives, leading to improved patient engagement and outcomes.

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