Addressing Multi-Modality Challenges

Running a busy multi-modality center is no easy task. Advanced Imaging of Port Charlotte, Fla, provides a wide array of imaging services including PET, PET-CT, MRI, nuclear medicine, biopsies, nuclear cardiology, ultrasound, echocardiology, and digital mammography. To keep pace with volume and stay efficient, the facility chose comprehensive PACS solutions from Thinking Systems of St Petersburg, Fla.

Aside from Web-based image review for conventional modalities like CR/DR, CT, and MRI, Thinking Systems offers PACS solutions for hybrid modalities and more. For example, the company provides archiving of all image types for nuclear medicine, PET/PET-CT, ultrasound, echocardiology, and cath lab. Image fusion between different modalities, such as PET-CT, PET-MR, SPECT-CT, and CT-MR, or among the same modalities, such as PET-PET, CT-CT, and MR-MR, is another key feature.

According to the company, its thin-client-based Web technology provides workstation functionality over the Web, allowing clinicians to view and manipulate images of all modalities, and perform PET-CT fusion, nuclear medicine processing, and quantitative analysis from any computer connected to the Internet. Most importantly, it means that clinicians—across town, or across the globe—can collaborate over the Web.

The system offers the advantage of centralized storage for both images and patient information and allows clinicians or staff members to perform key tasks such as patient registration, scheduling, exam tracking, staff and resource management, report generation, and distribution, etc, from any Windows computer on the network (intranet or Internet). ThinkingPACS™ and ThinkingRIS™ are based on an open architecture, using standard Microsoft Windows operating systems (Windows 2000, Windows XP, Windows 2003, etc) and off-the-shelf hardware.

According to Forrest Borchardt, practice administrator for Advanced Imaging, "We switched from a GE system in 2005, and we are very satisfied with Thinking Systems' service and technology. They have met our every need and have contributed greatly to our growth. Indeed, every time we needed a fix or some new software adjustment, they were very responsive. We have mutual respect for each other."

Borchardt considers Thinking Systems PACS software superior to any Advanced Imaging has encountered. "We send referring physicians a CD containing Thinking Systems software to install on their personal computer system. Then they're up and running."

In contrast to Merge's system, Thinking Systems' does not run on a MAC, rather only on Microsoft systems. "Also, we're still waiting for FDA approval of mammography viewing, which requires a 5-megapixel display," said Borchardt. "Thinking Systems is working on that upgrade."

The new technologies enable new efficiencies for viewing, distributing, and manipulating radiology data, including images and associated information. That adds up to better workflow and enhanced satisfaction with referral sources. In short, today's PACS solutions are all about helping imaging centers be more productive and profitable.

"Solving the problem of delivering an interactive experience for diagnostic images without the need for plug-ins is a true breakthrough," said Kulbago of the Merge system. "This technology ensures all clinicians have simple and comprehensive access to an image-enabled health record. There is tremendous value to health care practitioners and patients alike."