

Our Experience with Digital Imaging

Case Study - Gateway Animal Clinic

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Gateway is a five doctor, full service veterinary clinic. They use a PACS-3M with image distribution to their surgery suites and exam rooms. The digital images are created by a Fuji CR system.

I'm a veterinary surgeon and my wife is a veterinarian, and along with four other doctors we have a very busy practice in Anderson, California here in the northern Sierra Nevadas.

Like so many in our field, I had been watching digital imaging replace traditional film/screen x-ray for several years, wondering when and if it would make sense for our practice. Several years ago I took a serious look at DR solutions, but I could not justify the large financial investment required. In early 2006, our long time x-ray service company, West Coast Imaging, reviewed CR options with us and in June of 2006 we installed a digital imaging system comprised of a Fuji CR scanner and a Catella PACS solution provided by American Medical Sales ("AMS").

The first question my colleagues ask me is "has the system saved us money." My answer is that I think so. Although I have not taken pencil to

The more important benefit is the increase in the quality of the imaging services we can now provide to our clients. Let me explain. Unlike human patients who can take instructions not to move during x-ray exams, our patients move. As a result, when we had a traditional film system, we had to use high speed films with short exposures. The result was grainier films than we would like. What we have experienced with digital imaging are images with far higher resolution. This appears to be due to the higher sensitivity of the phosphor plate, the small "micron" resolution that can be scanned, and the clarity of the high resolution monitors used in the PACS system.

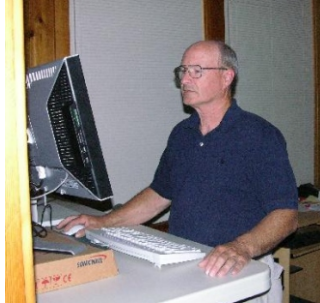
But there is more. The imaging tools provided by the PACS allow us to explore the information in our images in a way not possible with film. Here's one example. Like many of you, we see young animals that have ingested plastic parts. Although we recognize the symptoms, we have a hard time seeing them on x-rays. What we have found is that often with digital imaging and the use of the "invert" function that changes black to white and white to black, we can see these items in the digestive tract. This is a great help in planning treatment.

Another benefit is the ability to send images anywhere at any time. We can quickly get important cases to specialists for more detailed examination, or we can send images to our surgery area where we have a large screen display.

And, of course, being able to get all images, old and new, without having to wait to retrieve the films from physical storage is a great advantage. This is why having a CR and a PACS is important. It is the PACS that allows for the storage and distribution of images.

We also feel that purchasing our system from a local, knowledgeable service company was important. We have been pleased that the equipment we selected has worked nearly perfectly, but since we have removed our film processor, we need to be assured that any down time is minimal to non-existent. We have been extremely pleased by the support we have received from both our local x-ray dealer and our PACS provider.

Is our system perfect? No. But the "imperfection" comes from what more we can envision it helping us with in the future. During my interview with AMS, I gave their president several ideas for upgrades that might make their system do even more for us. It was nice to know he was taking notes.



paper, I think we are at least at "breakeven," but when I consider just the elimination of the employee time required to file and find films, I believe we are experiencing real savings.



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