Exa PACS Delivers Speed and Power to Help HNRA Grow its Hospital Reading Practice

Houston Northwest Radiology Association (HNRA) is a multispecialty radiology group with 35 radiologists currently covering five major hospitals, ranging from 200 to 500 beds. Three hospitals are stroke centers and one is a Level 2 trauma center. HNRA also provides radiology services to outpatient imaging and freestanding urgent care centers.

In 2018, HNRA installed Exa® PACS and has experienced significant growth since then, particularly in its hospital-based services.

In 2019, HNRA and Konica Minolta Healthcare embarked on a project to connect one major hospital—a 400-bed, Level 2 trauma center and comprehensive stroke center—to Exa PACS. Every imaging modality was connected to Exa PACS via a virtual private network (VPN). This setup had two critical purposes: it ensured quick and efficient access to all imaging studies for reading and serve as a redundant backup for continuity and disaster recovery. If the hospital's PACS ever went down, HNRA's radiologists could

continue reading and reporting seamlessly on Exa PACS. According to Dr. Muzammil A. Shafi, Managing Partner and neuroradiologist at HNRA, the original plan was for Exa PACS to be a solution for reading studies remotely from their central office and as a backup system. However, as the hospital's network expanded, Exa PACS quickly became essential in managing and integrating all exams, regardless of where they originated.

"As our practice grew, we realized Exa PACS could be our primary solution for all our clients," Dr. Shafi explains. "It's given us a lot of operational efficiency."

A Flexible Platform That Grows with You

Exa PACS provided HNRA the flexibility to expand and add new clients, thanks to its completely web-based nature. It isn't limited by workstation power or dependent on on-site servers. Exa PACS uses server-side rendering, meaning all the processing is done on the server, not the individual workstations. This prevents slowdowns from prefetching,

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as prior studies are immediately available. Radiologists can access imaging studies—including larger ones like 3D mammography or CT scans—rapidly, and because nothing is downloaded to workstations, patient data exposure is minimized.

"Exa PACS is incredibly fast, particularly with its server-side rendering," says Dr. Shafi. "We can review complex studies like CTs and MRIs much faster than we can with the hospital's own PACS."

With Exa PACS' custom workflow engine, HNRA has tailored filters for each subspecialty—neuro, body, breast, etc.—so that the appropriate studies auto-populate each radiologist's worklist. Additionally, filters can be set based on modality, referring physician or urgency.

Since Konica Minolta manages the backend of Exa PACS, HNRA's IT staff can focus on enhancing clinical productivity rather than maintaining networks or servers.

For Dr. Shafi and his team, Exa PACS stands out not only for its backend performance but also for its practical power. Speed and Efficiency Are at the Heart of Exa PACS

The speed of Exa PACS is not dependent on the individual device. It works on nearly any computer, tablet or smartphone, giving radiologists the ability to access images from virtually anywhere with an internet connection. Its Zero Footprint viewer offers full diagnostic toolsets without requiring any software installations, downloads or plugins.

"With Exa PACS, I can start scrolling through images in seconds—even for a cardiac CT," Dr. Shafi notes. "Other systems might take 30 to 60 seconds to load, but with Exa PACS, the images load almost instantaneously, even while the rest are loading in the background. Cross-sectional reconstructions or window changes happen with just a click."

Dr. Shafi adds that Exa's intuitive design makes it easy to access essential tools for all imaging modalities, from mammography to MRI. "There are no unnecessary steps to access the measuring tools or other functions—it's all readily available and accessible."

Importantly, the system is user-friendly for everyone, regardless of technical proficiency.

"Super users can take advantage of shortcuts to reduce mouse and keyboard clicks," Dr. Shafi says. "Even users who are less technically inclined find it just as simple and intuitive to use."

A Preferred Choice Among Users

HNRA has continued to grow, onboarding several new clients. Each has access to Exa PACS, even if their hospital or imaging center has its own system.

"I've heard from many clients that they prefer using our Exa PACS over their own because it's so user-friendly," Dr. Shafi says. "In fact, some have gone on to purchase Exa PACS after using ours."

Even when downtime occurs, whether planned or unexpected, Konica Minolta's support ensures minimal disruption. Most issues are resolved in minutes, and any upgrades are planned in advance to allow HNRA to prepare.

If a hospital's PACS goes down, technologists can send the study to Exa PACS with just one click and the studies will auto-populate, allowing radiologists to continue working without interruption. Even if a display issue occurs, the radiologist can easily switch to Exa PACS and proceed.

One of the hospitals HNRA covers includes Exa PACS in its downtime procedures. "We can switch to Exa PACS and keep working without needing to physically go to the hospital to read cases," Dr. Shafi explains.

Having worked in Houston for 15 years, Dr. Shafi has used a variety of different vendors' PACS, and he's clear about his preference. "Exa PACS is by far the best system I've used. It's intuitive, fast, and doesn't get in the way of our work," he says. "The key for a radiologist is to have everything you need—measuring tools, ROI, image analysis—easily accessible, and Exa delivers that. The speed, thanks to server-side rendering, is also something we really appreciate. It's been a fantastic experience for us."