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Information technology (IT) is the application of computers and telecommunication equipment to store, retrieve, transmit, and manipulate data. Today, information technology is used in a wide range of industries, including medical science known as Health Information Technology (HIT). The term is a broad concept that encompasses a collection of technologies used to store, retrieve, share, and analyze health care information for communication and decision making purposes. Progressively, more healthcare providers are using HIT to improve patient care. Its application involves both computer hardware and software and other communications features that can be networked to build systems for moving and optimizing health information.

In this paper we are going to discuss the role of Information Technology in the medical world with a specific focus on technologies, such as computer-assisted prosthetics, implantable devices, neural-electronic implants, and the importance of electronic health records as part of health IT. This paper will also discuss the various roles that HIPAA plays in the medical world and its implications. Computer Assisted Prosthetics During the last decades, several information and communication technology tools, such as computer-aided design (CAD) and computer-aided engineering systems, have been introduced to support the product development process by reducing the need for physical prototypes, as well as reducing costs and times.

1 Most of the components are standards (e. g., foot and knee) and can be selected from a manufacturer's catalogue, while others, such as the socket, have to be created on the basis of the patient's anatomy. The socket is a

critical component and designed and manufactured almost completely in a manual way, greatly relying on the experience and skills of prosthetics technicians. ² However, there are problems in the process of preparing and fabricating the prosthesis manually, such as loss of information, distorted shape, and measurement errors. The inherent issues embedded within these types of manual processes can be overcome with the help of computer-aided design (CAD) and computer-aided manufacturing (CAM). The computer-aided system allows for better prosthesis designs and production efficiency, and enables the reproducibility of models that have been created and stored on the computer. There are some CAD/CAM prosthetic systems (e.

g., Bioshape, Rodin4D Neo and Canfit) available on the market. Through reverse engineering techniques (usually laser scanning), the external shape of the stump from which the socket and the positive cast are derived can be acquired, and basic models stored in libraries can also be modified. ³ The process of generating the final prosthesis consists of three stages: digitization of the contralateral and residual limbs; computer-aided design (e. g. below-knee prosthesis); and computer-aided manufacturing of the finished prosthesis. ⁴ The digitization of the contralateral and residual limbs is accomplished by a mechanical digitizer controlled by a computer to read topographical information from cast models of the patient's limbs.

This process is controlled by a software program that converts the data from the contralateral limb to a mirror 3-D image of the limb. ⁵ The method for obtaining this data is done through the use of a laser scanning camera system, such as the Insignia scanning wand developed by Polhemus. The

camera system acquires a three-dimensional shape of the patient's limb, which is then stored on a computer through CAD software and then later used to create the customized diagnostic prosthetic socket. A laser light, similar to the ones used to read barcodes, is emitted from a handheld device. This light scans the entire limb and captures an identical digital image replicating the shape and size of the patient's limb. The second stage of generating the final prosthetic is the computer-aided design of the prosthesis. Computer-aided design of the finished prosthesis can be broken down into four phases of development: creation, alignment, shaping, and finishing.

This process is accomplished by utilizing a pre-existing programmable solid modelling package to generate the design of the prosthesis. 6 The digitized stump and limb are created automatically using the data obtained in the first stage, and then a replica of the socket model is developed by scaling the stump model. The system contains algorithms that allow the prosthetist to rotate the limb, socket or stump models to any alignment configuration that provides a comfortable fit for the patient.

In regards to the shaping substage, more algorithms embedded within the system generate a smooth transition between the areas of the limb and socket models that overlap, thus providing an even outer covering for cosmesis. 7 The final phase of design is the finishing phase. Options included in this algorithm allow the prosthetist to cut the stump into the socket model, thus providing inner contours for the patient's stump. 8 Once the final look of the prosthetic is completed, a data file is created containing the data needed for the next phase—the actual manufacturing of the prosthetic. The CAM

software is used to generate the machine code and thenecessary data is sent to the machine for the fabrication of the finishedprosthesis. Overall, the use of CAD/CAM has many advantages since most of the design algorithms have been automated and require only simple input from theprosthetist to be performed accurately. CAD/CAM also allows the designs to be more exact, thereby creating less dependency on the technique or skill level of the prosthetic practitioner.

CAD systems exist today for all of the major computer platforms, including Windows, Linux, Unix and Mac OS X. The user interface generally centers on a computer mouse, but a pen and digitizing graphic tablet can also be used. View manipulation can be accomplished with a space mouse (or spaceball).
9 The systems however, are not currently integrated with simulation tools, such as finite element analysis (FEA) or multi-body systems, to validate the prosthesis design. 10 Yet, technologies have advanced so that the use of virtual reality systems is also being developed to optimize medical treatments.

Research is being conducted on a new computer-based design framework wherein a digital model of the patient is used in designing and testing the prosthetic in a completely virtual environment. According to the authors of this framework, the virtual model of the patient will be the backbone of the whole system, based on a biomechanical general-purpose model customized with the patient's characteristics or anthropometric measures. Various works proposing the use of FEA to simulate the behavior of prosthetic components and for analyzing socket-residual limb interaction are available. The software

platformcomprehends two main environments: the prosthesis modelling laboratory and thevirtual testing laboratory. The first permits the three-dimensional model ofthe prosthesis to be configured and generated, while the second allows theprosthetics to virtually set up the artificial leg and simulate the patient'spostures and movements, validating its functionality and configuration.

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