

Anson Medical take a no-risk approach to patient data with Colton Computers.

Joanne McRae is Director of Anson Medical, one of Orange's oldest medical practices. And she's a big fan of Colton Computers.

She first met Mitch Colton when she was a high school PE teacher, and Mitch a student. Even then, says Joanne, Mitch (although not keen on PE) was integral to the running of the AV for school events, assemblies, and functions. When Joanne accidentally deleted the entire department's programs, it was Mitch to the rescue. And when she started her first business, Mitch helped her set up her technology environment.

The move to modernise

Joanne took over from her father as Director of Anson Medical in mid-2018. "The practice started in 1953," she says, "and my father has been a GP here since 1979. We currently have five full-time GPs and cover up to 200 patients per day, with a load of about 6,500 thousand active patients and a total patient list of around 13,000.

"While we're a relatively small practice, we punch well above our weight when it comes to how the federal government measures our numbers. Our GPs do a lot of face-to-face consultations, and we're constantly busy. So, it's critical that our IT and phones always work. We're highly reliant on our technology to connect with patient records and for telehealth services."

Joanne says that when she took over the practice, her priority was to modernise its technology environment. "The way that our technology was set up wasn't as reliable as we needed it to be, and that came with inherent risks.



Every device we used was a different type and spec, and backups were on a USB drive that was removed from the building nightly.

"After years of working in large organisations, I knew we needed a tighter focus on compliance and to implement a comprehensive IT strategy. So, we asked Colton for their advice. They reviewed our setup and came back with timelines and costs. It wasn't a big pushy sales pitch, instead, they took a personal approach that I really liked."

“I also found it reassuring that Colton already worked with other general practices; they understood the sector. They were experienced in working with Microsoft products in conjunction with medical software, and the specific security and firewall requirements we had to observe. They offered us both hardware and software support, that’s been a key part of the relationship.”

Farewell to faxes

As health information is inherently sensitive by nature, the sector is one of the most highly targeted by cybercriminals. Like most general practices, Anson Medical regularly receives requests from other health professionals, patients, or third-party organisations to share information. And like everyone else, they’d do this via fax or mail to avoid the risk of cyberattacks and to overcome the disparate systems used by each provider.

“Australian medical systems are very fragmented,” says Joanne. With no single approach to securely sharing health data from hospital to GP or specialist, to pharmacy, it’s far from an easy process. Even if a person changes practices within Orange, it’s not a seamless information transfer.



So, we all had to resort to methods - like faxing - that are inherently inefficient and outdated.

“It’s been a massive issue, so it’s been great to have advice from Mitch on the risks of data breaches. Our team members now understand the need to discourage patients from emailing us their information, and why we’ve introduced new email data encryption methods. If we must email something, we can. But Colton has ensured that it’s in an appropriate way that reduces our risk of exposing patient data or sending personal information to the wrong address. Everything we share is encrypted and password protected, so we can move information safely and securely.”

“In terms of our cyber security, Colton’s expertise has been invaluable. As the health sector is such a big target, having the right security systems, two-factor authentication for remote desktop use, firewalls, encryption, up-to-date information and training, and more, is important. That kind of support has been a big part of our successful relationship with Colton.”

Positive planning

Like most organisations, Anson Medical struggled with the fallout of working through a pandemic. “It’s been a pretty tough three and a half years,” says Joanne. “Over this time, having remote access so we can access and keep up with our paperwork, support patients, and enable the teamwork required to cover each other has been really critical.”

“We see 20 patients an hour. So, if we don’t have technology that works, it quickly creates a major backlog - you can’t just turn away patients when they need help. The bottom line is that IT also impacts my business’ ability to survive in terms of income.”

“Five years ago,” says Joanne, “I took on board some valuable lessons from Business Orange (formerly Orange Business Chamber) of which Mitch has been a long-term sponsor and board member. They emphasised that a high degree of preparedness was critical for small business owners. And when I looked at the practice at the time, I could see some red flags.

“Now,” she says, “we’ve got Plans B, C, and D. They cover everything from loss of connectivity to having to evacuate and temporarily close our practice. We have our plans printed out and pinned on the noticeboard, so everyone knows exactly what has to happen in any circumstance.”

Luckily, Anson Medical have only had to implement Plan D once when a heavy snowfall made the practice inaccessible.

“So as to not inconvenience our patients, our doctors elected to work from home rather than cancel appointments,” says Joanne. “Colton set up our environment to support secure remote access to patient files, and enable phone calls, as well as provide a recorded message to patients who called the practice that we were closed. It was a great solution.”

Safe and secure with help from Colton

These days, when it comes to security, it's best practice all the way for Anson Medical. “Now, we're 100% compliant,” says Joanne. “And after a recent visit from the Royal Australian College of GPs, we're a fully accredited practice. We meet and exceed all their requirements for digital and data security.

“That's why we place such a high value on our relationship with Colton. We like that they're local, hands-on, and responsive. When things break, when the internet goes down, we know they've got our back. They've helped us to run our practice in a very dynamic, challenging industry in an environment made high-risk by external players.”

“That's been invaluable. I can sleep at night because of the confidence I have in our relationship and partnership with Colton. They make our IT work.”

