



US008756437B2

(12) **United States Patent**
Monk et al.

(10) **Patent No.:** **US 8,756,437 B2**
(45) **Date of Patent:** **Jun. 17, 2014**

(54) **SYSTEM AND METHOD OF ENCRYPTION
FOR DICOM VOLUMES**

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(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this
patent is extended or adjusted under 35
U.S.C. 154(b) by 1189 days.

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(21) Appl. No.: **12/546,611**

The International Search Report, PCT/US2009/054799, dated Mar.
3, 2011.

(22) Filed: **Aug. 24, 2009**

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(65) **Prior Publication Data**

US 2010/0115288 A1 May 6, 2010

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Related U.S. Application Data

(60) Provisional application No. 61/091,161, filed on Aug.
22, 2008, provisional application No. 61/119,012,
filed on Dec. 1, 2008.

(51) **Int. Cl.**
G06F 21/24 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**
USPC **713/193**; 713/165; 713/166; 380/44

(58) **Field of Classification Search**
USPC 713/193, 166, 165; 380/44
See application file for complete search history.

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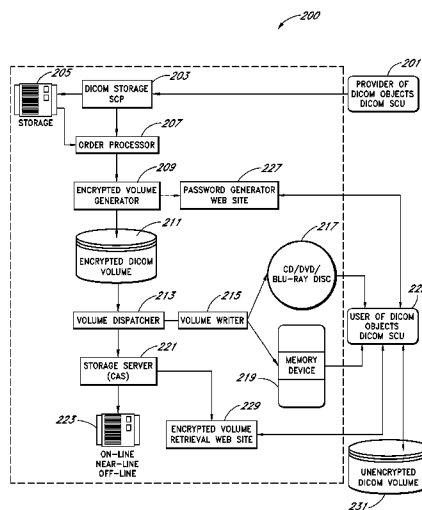
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

Digital image storage and management systems capable of
producing encrypted DICOM volumes on different types of
media (e.g., Blu-ray, CD, DVD, memory stick, USB flash
drive, etc.), with or without the automatic generation of
labels, systems and mechanisms to generate and manage
passwords for the encrypted volumes, and systems and
mechanisms to manage access to encrypted data on such
volumes are disclosed. Generated encrypted DICOM vol-
umes, which can comprise confidential patient data, can be
securely interchanged, archived, and distributed to users. The
disclosed systems and methods can permit authorized users to
access encrypted data, even if the users do not have access to
the original encryption mechanism. Encrypted data stored on
the volume can be easily and securely accessed by a variety of
authorized users.

6 Claims, 9 Drawing Sheets



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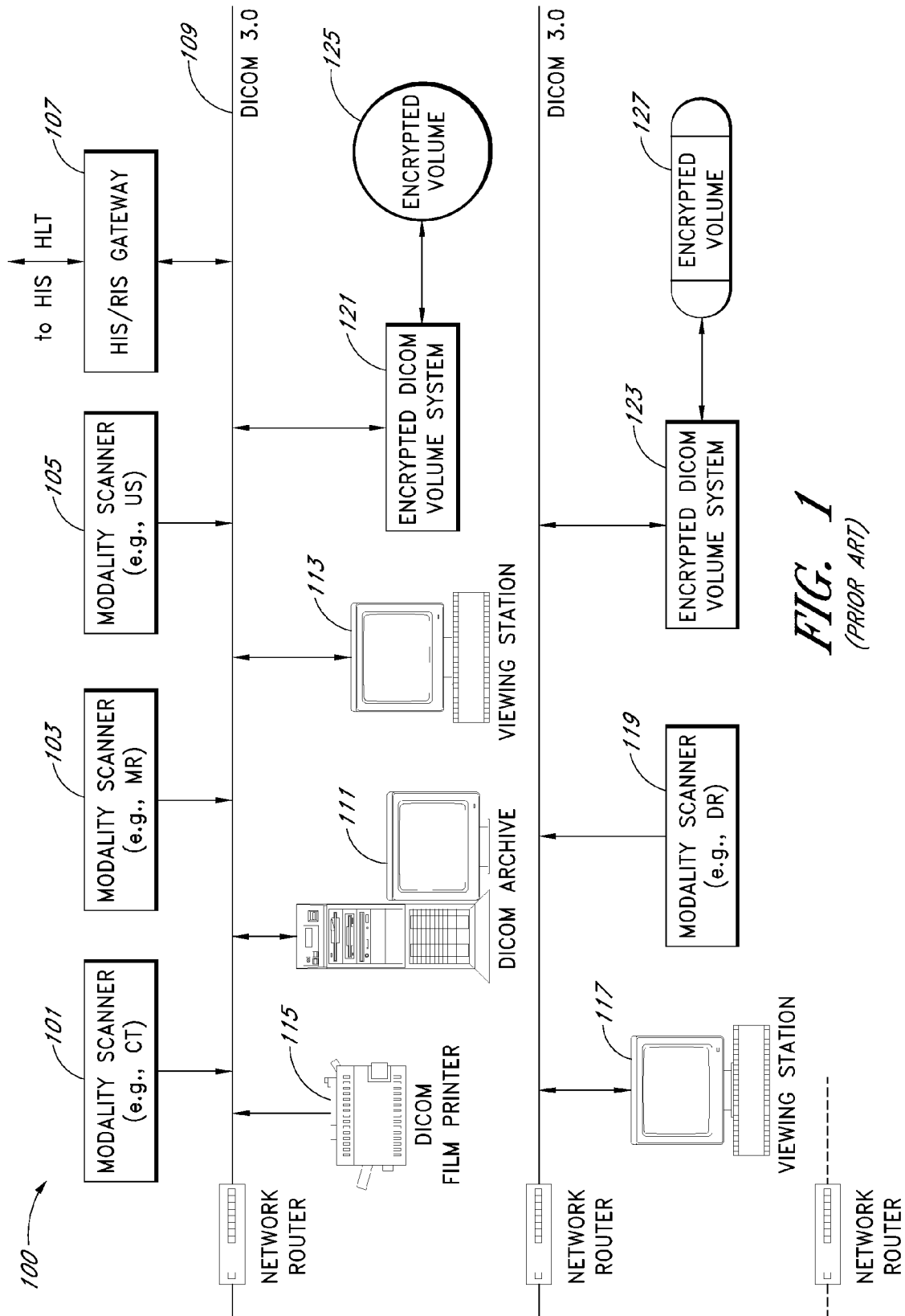
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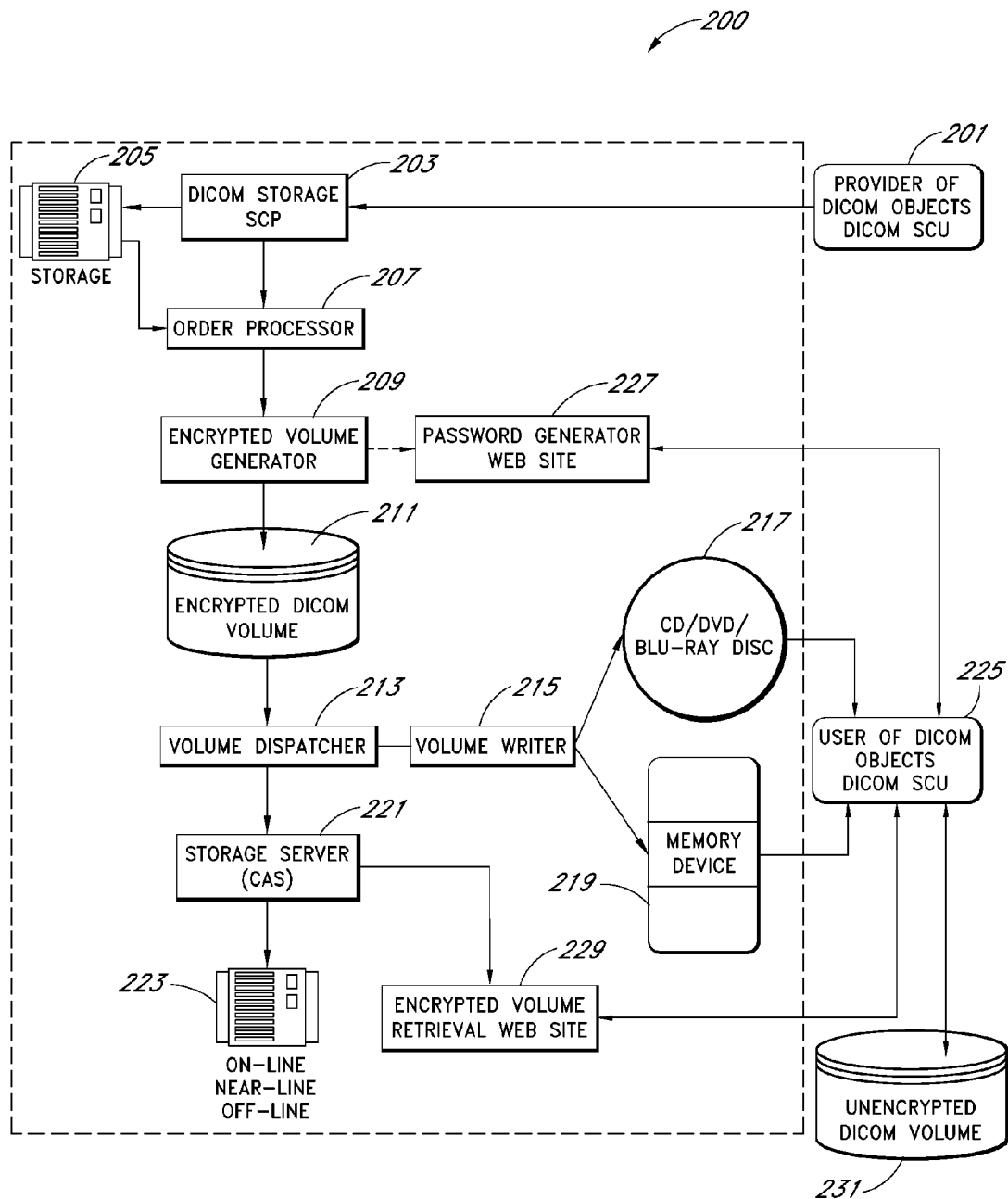


FIG. 2

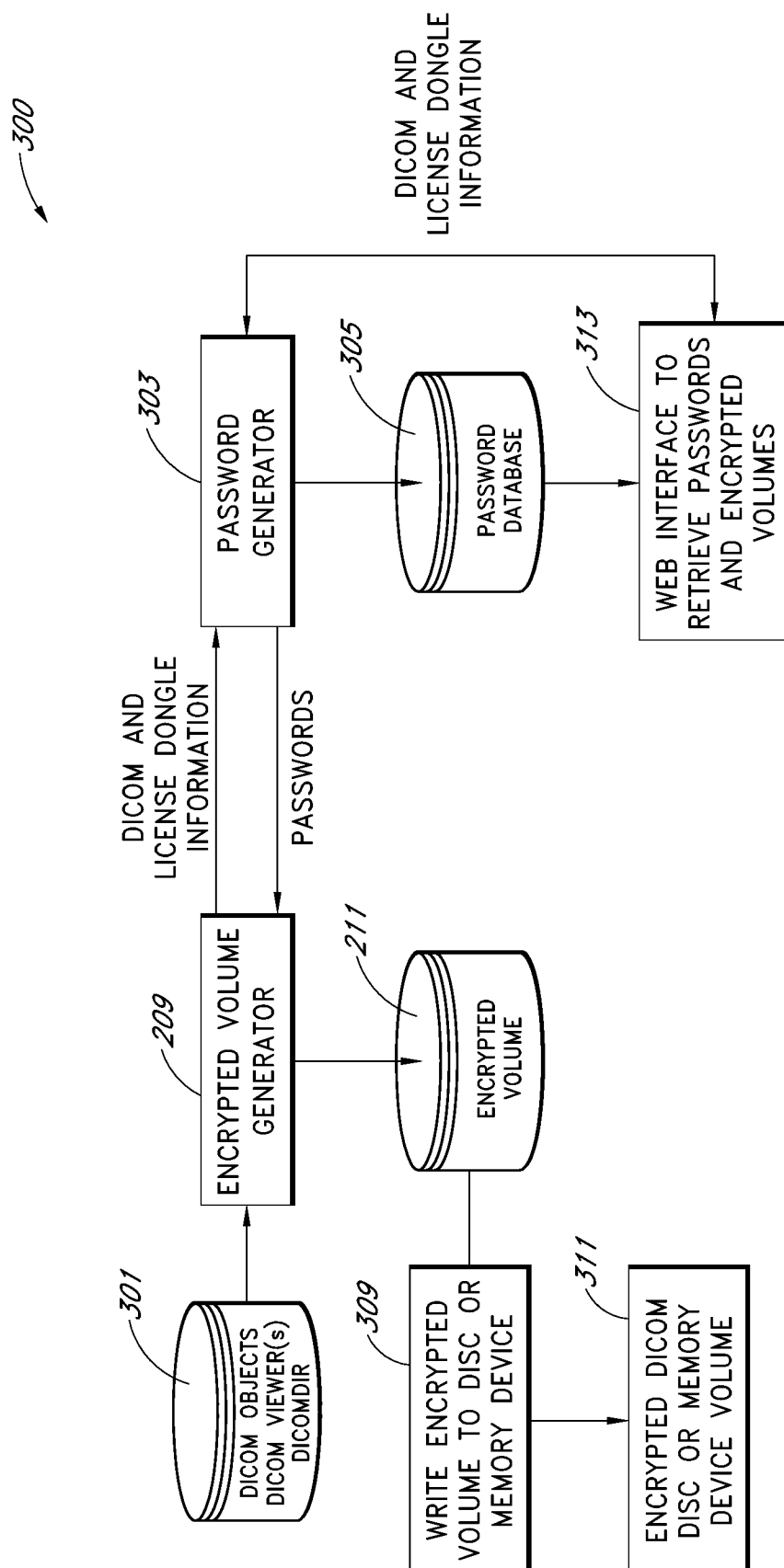
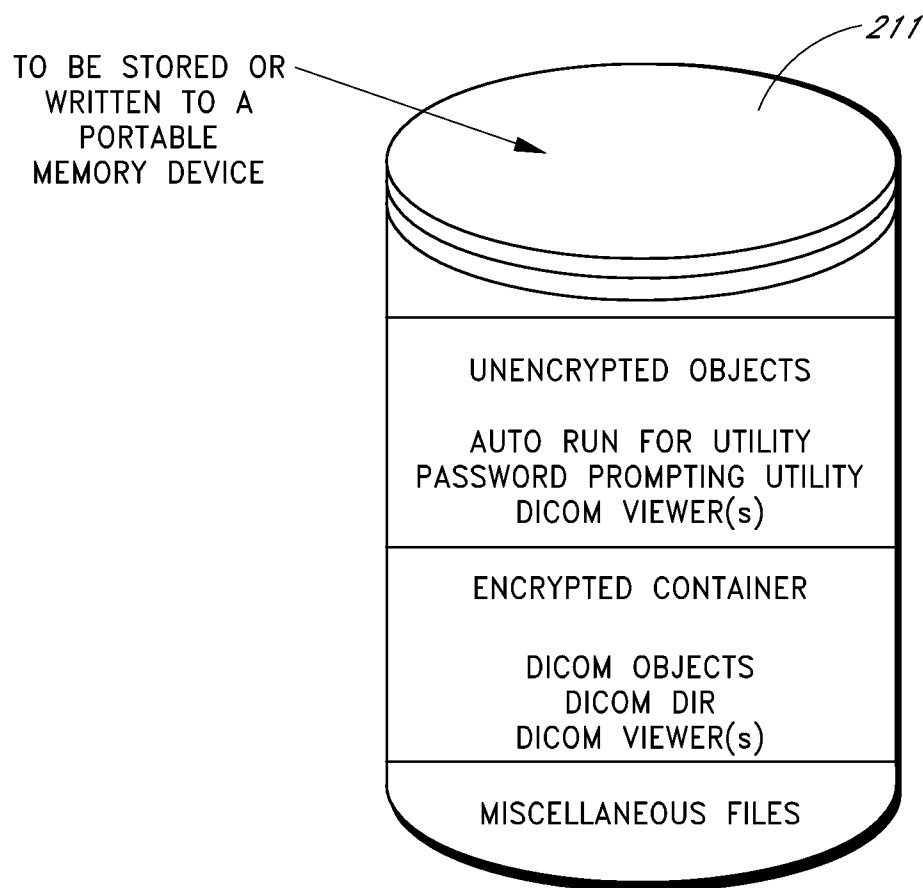


FIG. 3

*FIG. 4*

CONTENT ADDRESSABLE STORAGE (CAS)
DIRECT ATTACHED STORAGE (DAS)
NETWORK ATTACHED STORAGE (NAS)
STORAGE AREA NETWORK (SAN)

217A

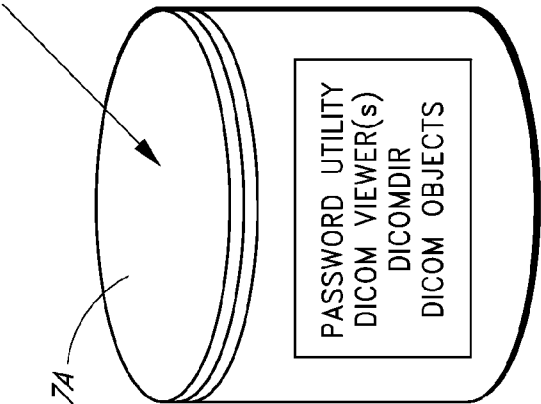


FIG. 5A

BLU-RAY
CD
DVD
OTHER OPTICAL DISCS

217B

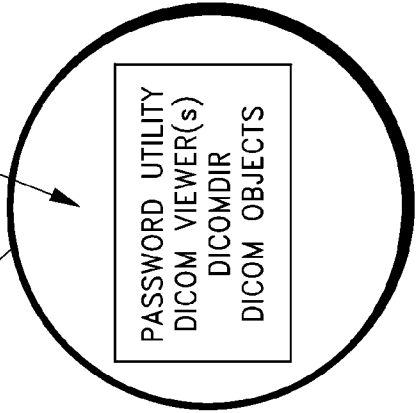


FIG. 5B

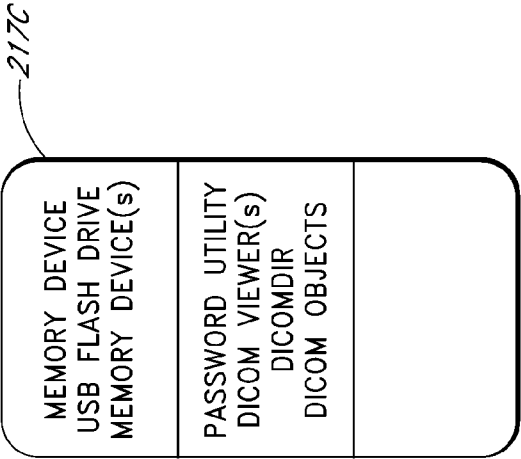
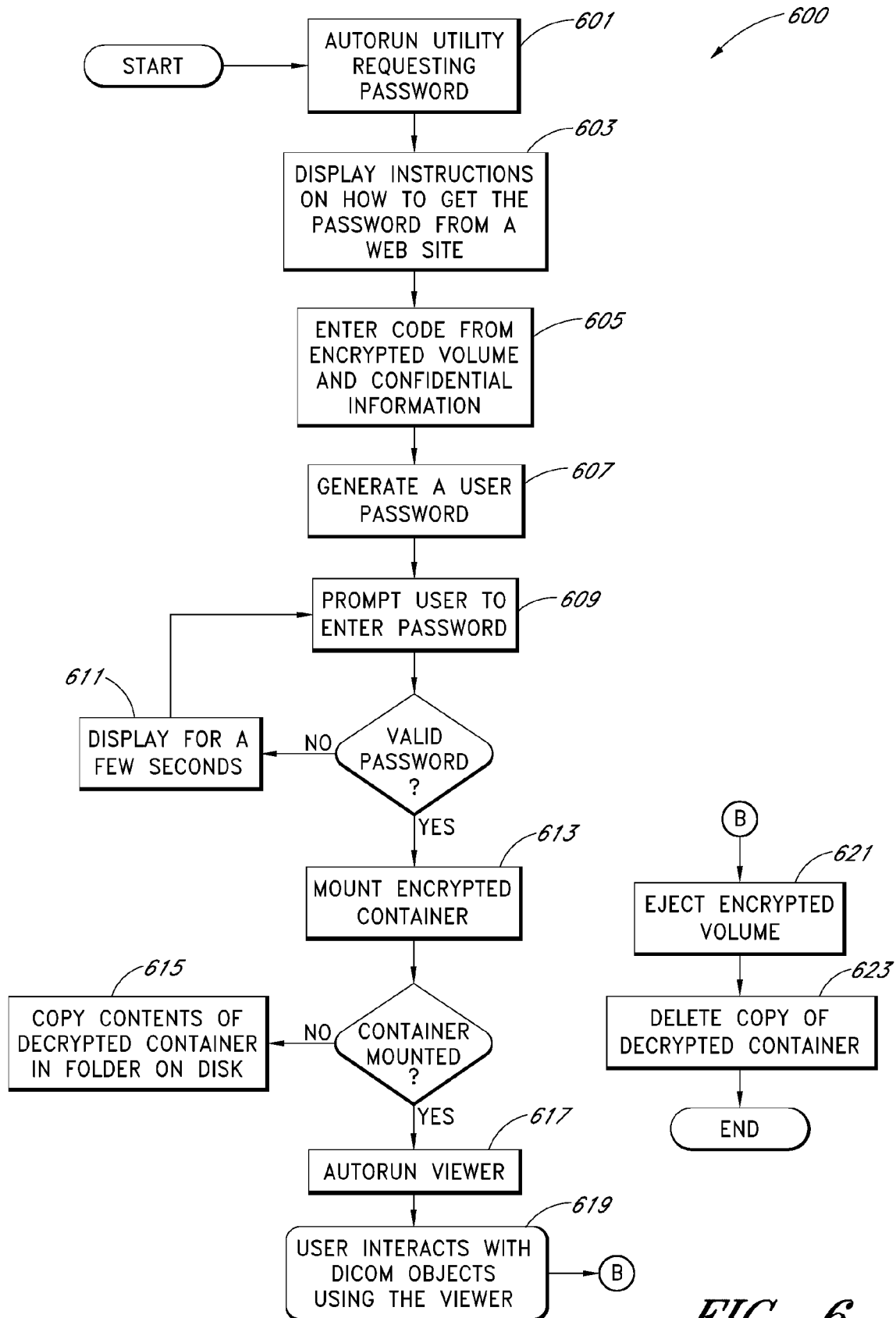


FIG. 5C



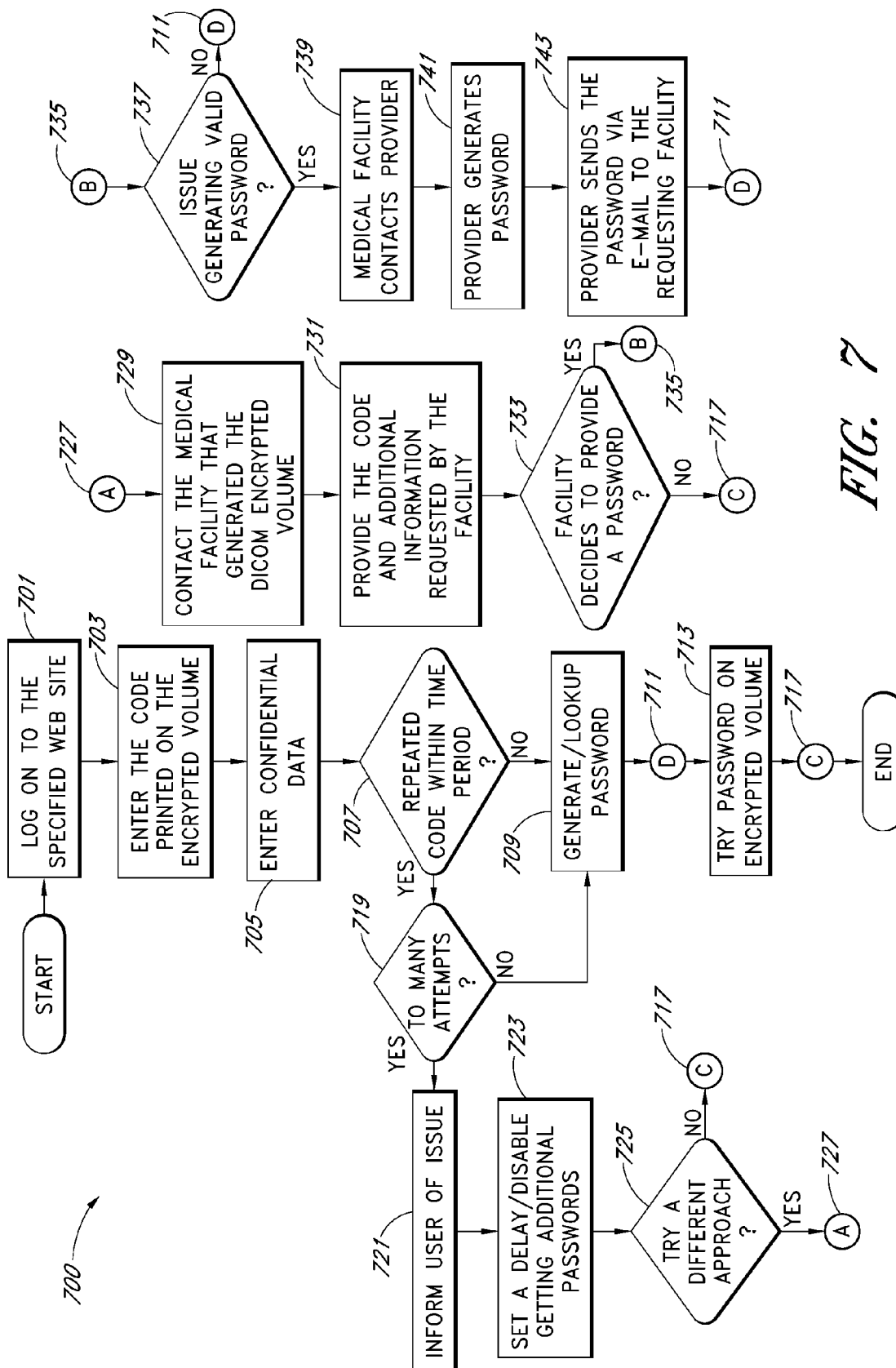
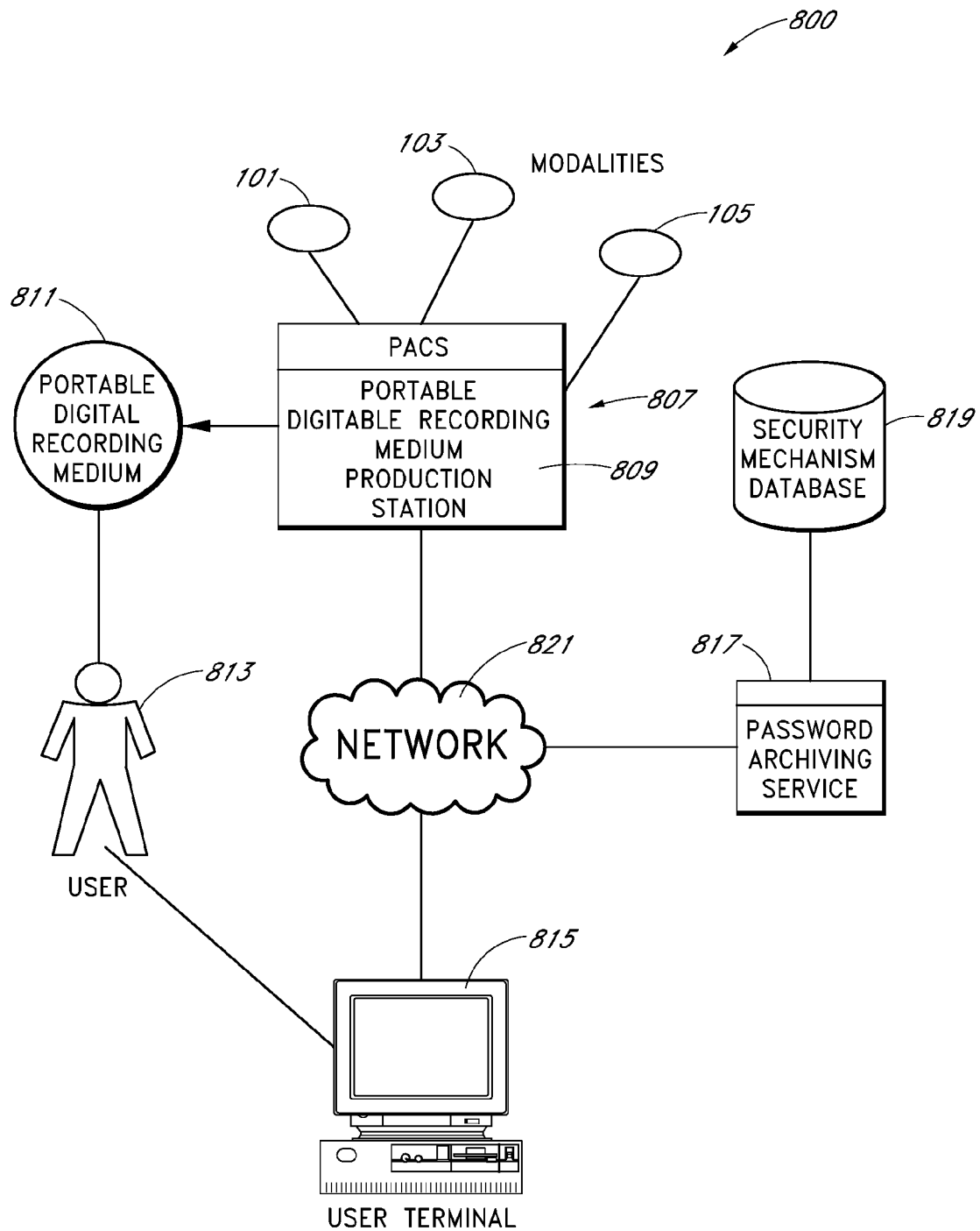


FIG. 7

*FIG. 8*

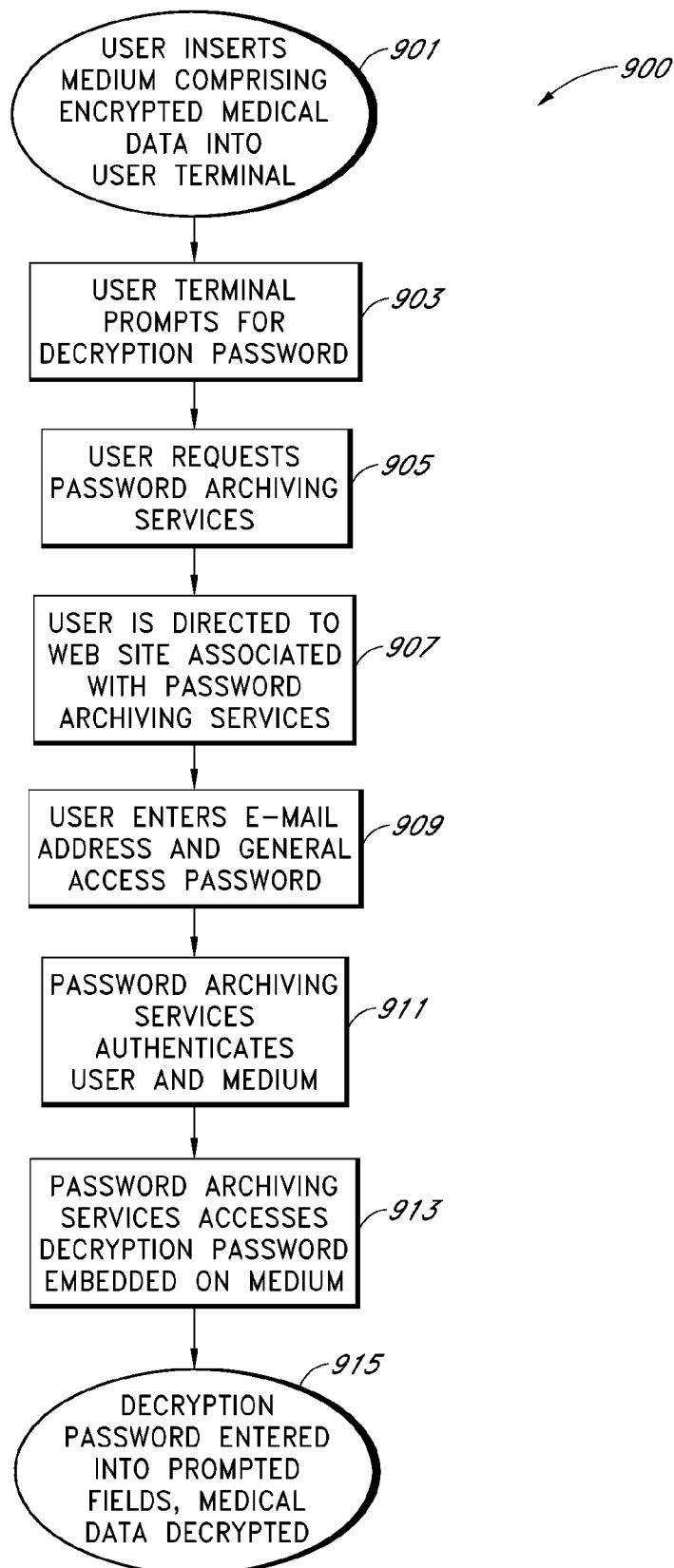


FIG. 9

SYSTEM AND METHOD OF ENCRYPTION FOR DICOM VOLUMES

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application claims priority to U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 61/091,161, filed on Aug. 22, 2008, and to U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 61/119,012, filed on Dec. 1, 2008, the entire contents of each of which are hereby incorporated by this express reference.

BACKGROUND

1. Field

This disclosure relates to the Digital Imaging and Communications in Medicine (DICOM) standard for handling, storing, printing, transmitting, and distributing medical imaging information and, more specifically, to encrypting DICOM volumes and accessing encrypted DICOM volumes.

2. Description of the Related Art

Picture archiving and communication systems (PACS) are computers or networks dedicated to the storage, retrieval, distribution, and presentation of medical data. For example, PACS are frequently used to store medical image data in the Digital Imaging and Communications in Medicine (DICOM) format, which is a standard for handling, storing, printing, and transmitting medical images. DICOM provides a standardized file format and network communications protocol. The communication protocol is an application protocol that uses TCP/IP to communicate between systems. DICOM is prevalent because it enables the integration of modalities, such as scanners, servers, workstations, printers, and network hardware from multiple manufacturers into a PACS.

Certain PACS comprise systems for recording medical data such as medical images onto removable media. These portable digital recording media offer a number of advantages to users, such as allowing users to access their medical data from home, conveniently transporting medical data to a new physician or to a specialist, and the like. However, these media are vulnerable to theft, loss, copying, etc. Part Ten (10) ("Part 10") of the DICOM standard has attempted to define systems for creating secure (e.g., encrypted) volumes for storing medical data. Part 10 of the Standard advantageously permits a user via a Graphical User Interface (GUI) to select one or more patients, studies, series, or images for which associated images will be written and/or labeled into one or more encrypted volumes using different types of applicable media (e.g., Blu-ray, CD, DVD, memory stick, USB flash drive, etc.). However, a significant problem remains in that a person desiring to access the stored medical data may not remember or know the key (e.g., password) for "unlocking" encrypted medical data.

Accordingly, there is a need for an encrypted digital DICOM data management system which reduces access time and which requires less intervention by medical facility personnel.

SUMMARY

Because of confidentiality mechanisms and procedures, access to DICOM volumes holding confidential patient information (e.g., medical data) is typically restricted within a medical facility's computer network. After the DICOM volumes leave the medical facility, however, the volumes become susceptible to access by unauthorized users. Various embodiments provide methods and systems to encrypt and

provide access to encrypted medical data stored on a portable digital recording medium, such that only authorized users can read the contents of the medium. By providing an encryption and decryption methods and systems for the volumes and by allowing authorized access to decryption (i.e., access) passwords, patient confidentiality can be maintained. The systems and methods disclosed herein can permit authorized users to access encrypted data stored on the portable medium even if the users do not have access to the original encryption mechanism. Thus, encrypted data stored on the volume can be easily and securely accessed by a variety of authorized users.

In at least one embodiment, a computer-implemented system for providing access to securely stored medical data is provided. The system can include a database configured to store decryption passwords for decrypting encrypted medical data stored on a portable medium; a secure interface configured to authenticate a request for decryption of medical data stored on the portable medium; and a password retrieval service. The password retrieval service can be configured to receive the authenticated request from the secure interface; and to retrieve from the database a decryption password uniquely associated with medical data stored on the portable medium, wherein the portable medium is associated with one decryption password. The password retrieval service can be further configured to communicate the decryption password for accessing medical data stored on the portable medium, wherein the decryption password is used for transforming the encrypted medical data into plaintext.

In at least one embodiment, a computer-implemented method of providing access to an encrypted medical data stored on a portable medium is provided. The method can include the steps of authenticating a user; retrieving a decryption key associated with the portable medium; accessing a security mechanism stored on the portable medium and retrieving a decryption password; and comparing the decryption key with the decryption password. When there is a match, the method can include transforming the encrypted medical data stored on the portable medium into format accessible by the user, wherein the decryption key is used for transforming the encrypted medical data into plaintext.

In at least one embodiment, a computer-implemented method of creating portable medium comprising encrypted medical data is provided. The method can include the steps of receiving medical data from one or more modalities; selecting a subset of the received medical data to be included on a portable medium; encrypting the subset of medical data using an encryption mechanism; generating a security mechanism for decrypting the encrypted medical data, wherein the security mechanism is used for transforming the encrypted medical data into plaintext; and recording the encrypted medical data on a portable medium.

In certain embodiments, the security mechanism stored on the portable medium can be encrypted.

In certain embodiments, the security mechanism can be selected from the group consisting of CMS, PKCS #5, SHA-1, MD5, RSA, AES, and DES.

In at least one embodiment, a computer-implemented method of creating portable medium comprising encrypted medical data is disclosed. The method can include the steps of receiving medical data from one or more modalities; selecting a subset of the received medical data to be included on a portable medium; encrypting the subset of medical data using an encryption mechanism; determining a security mechanism for decrypting the encrypted medical data, wherein the security mechanism uniquely corresponds to a user of the portable

3

medium such that the user is associated with one security mechanism; and recording the encrypted medical data on a portable medium.

In certain embodiments, the security mechanism can be recorded on the portable medium.

In certain embodiments, the security mechanism can be a password used for transforming the encrypted medical data into plaintext.

In certain embodiments, the encryption mechanism can be selected from the group consisting of CMS, PKCS #5, SHA-1, MD5, RSA, AES, and DES.

In at least one embodiment, a computer-implemented system for providing access to securely stored medical data is disclosed. The system can include a database configured to store a decryption password for decrypting medical data stored on a portable medium, wherein the decryption password is generated from information comprised in at least one tag associated with medical data. The system can further include a secure interface configured to authenticate a request for decryption of medical data stored on the portable medium and a password retrieval services. The password retrieval service can be configured to receive the authenticated request from the secure interface; receive information comprised in the at least one tag; retrieve from the database the decryption password uniquely associated with medical data stored on the portable medium, wherein one decryption password is associated with information comprised in the at least one tag; and communicate the decryption password for accessing medical data stored on the portable medium, wherein the decryption password is used for transforming the encrypted medical data into plaintext.

In certain embodiments, the at least one tag can be a DICOM tag.

In certain embodiments, the secure interface can be a secure web interface.

In certain embodiments, medical data can be represented in DICOM format.

These and other features and advantages of the invention will become apparent from the following description of embodiments. Neither this summary nor the following detailed description purports to define the invention. The invention is defined only by the claims.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

These and other features will now be described with reference to the drawing summarized below. These drawings and the associated description are provided to illustrate specific embodiments, and not to limit the scope of the invention.

FIG. 1 illustrates a block diagram of a Picture Archiving and Communications System (PACS).

FIG. 2 illustrates a block diagram of a system for secure storage and retrieval of DICOM data.

FIG. 3 illustrates a flow chart for generating passwords for encrypted DICOM Part 10 volumes in accordance with some embodiments

FIG. 4 illustrates a plurality of different types of encrypted DICOM Part 10 volumes (e.g., CD, DVD, Blu-ray, flash drive, etc.) implementing the encryption method in accordance with some embodiments.

FIGS. 5A-5C illustrate encrypted DICOM Part 10 volumes and associated data stored thereon in accordance with some embodiments.

4

FIG. 6 illustrates a flow chart for accessing the contents of an encrypted DICOM Part 10 volume in accordance with some embodiments.

FIG. 7 illustrates a flow chart for obtaining a password to access the contents of an encrypted DICOM Part 10 volume in accordance with some embodiments.

FIG. 8 illustrates a block diagram of another system configured for secure storage and retrieval of DICOM data according to some embodiments.

FIG. 9 illustrates a process flow for accessing encrypted DICOM data stored on a portable medium according to some embodiments.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

In the following detailed description, references are made to the accompanying drawings that illustrate specific embodiments in which the invention may be practiced. Electrical, mechanical, programmatic and structural changes may be made to the embodiments without departing from the spirit and scope of the disclosure. The following detailed description is, therefore, not to be taken in a limiting sense and the scope of the disclosure is defined by the appended claims and their equivalents.

FIG. 1 illustrates a block diagram of a PACS digital image management system **100**. The system can include a plurality of input imaging devices, a plurality of output imaging devices, a plurality of image display stations and archive server communicatively interconnected via a network. Each input imaging device can be an image-generating device capable of producing a digital image. For example, in a medical imaging environment input imaging devices can be a variety of medical imaging modalities such as computed tomography (CT) **101**, digital radiography (DR) **119**, magnetic resonance (MR) **103**, and/or ultrasound (US) devices **105**, manufactured by a number of different manufacturers, such as General Electric, Phillips, Siemens, Toshiba, and others.

The digital images produced by input imaging devices can be communicated via a network to output imaging devices (e.g., viewing stations **113** and **117**, film printer **115**, etc.), display stations, and an archive. In addition to communicating the generated images, the input imaging device can communicate customer specific information. For example, in a medical environment input-imaging devices can communicate a patient's name, a physician's name and a modality type. In at least one embodiment, images are communicated over network using a data communications protocol developed by the American College of Radiology (ACR) and the National Electrical Manufacturers Association (NEMA) known as the DICOM protocol (e.g., DICOM 3.0).

The DICOM protocol can be implemented using a TCP/IP connection **109** between the communicating devices Health information systems (HIS) and radiology information systems (RIS) gateway **107** providing medical data, such as in the HL-7 format, can be connected via connection **109**.

The archive **111** can store digital images and reports received from the modalities over the network according to the customer specific information associated with the image. The archive can initially store the received object on "short-term" storage device (e.g., NAS, RAID). The archive can manage a database (not shown) in order to maintain information about each image, including the location of each image. The database can be centralized or distributed.

Upon request by a user, such as a radiologist or radiology technician, or by another device (e.g., HIS-RIS broker), the archive **111** can retrieve stored objects from a managed storage device and communicates the images and reports to display stations **113** and **117** for viewing. In addition, the archive **111** can communicate the retrieved images to output imaging devices to produce a hardcopy output of the retrieved image. In a medical environment, output imaging devices can be continuous tone laser imagers for forming an image on an imaging element.

Output imaging devices can also include a processor station (e.g., a DICOM film printer **115**) for chemical processing and developing of the output image formed on a photographic element. The element can be photo-thermographic and can be thermally processed and need not be chemically processed. Other imaging processes are also suitable for output imaging devices, including direct thermal imaging, ablation imaging, dye transfer, inkjet, dye sublimation and thermal mass transfer.

In some embodiments, medical data can be communicated to encrypted DICOM volume systems **121** and **123** for storage on an encrypted volume according to the DICOM Part 10 standard. For example, the encrypted volume can be an optical disk (e.g., a CD, DVD, Blu-Ray, etc.) **125** or a removable memory (e.g., flash) device **127**.

FIG. 2 illustrates a system **200** for secure storage and retrieval of DICOM objects. In some embodiments, a provider of DICOM objects **201** can send DICOM objects for storage. DICOM objects can be stored in a disk configuration (e.g., Direct Attached Storage (DAS), Network Attached Storage (NAS) or Storage Area Network (SAN) or be sent to a Content Addressable Storage (CAS) server (e.g., iCAS server). The provider **201** can act as a DICOM storage service class user (SCU), and the DICOM storage module **203** can store the DICOM objects in storage **205** as the objects are received.

At some point in time, such as based on an automatic (set by schedules) order or manual (generated by users) order, a set of one or more DICOM objects can be selected by an order processor **207** to be included in an encrypted DICOM Part 10 volume **211**. The volume **211** can comprise medical data, a DICOMDIR directory (according to the DICOM Part 10 specifications), and one or more DICOM viewers. Additional data can be included (e.g., text file with a list of DICOM objects, text file holding the customer string of the USB license dongle connected to the computer system generating the encrypted volume, etc.). The volume **211** can be generated by an encrypted volume generator **209** by writing the contents to a container holding the original data in an encrypted fashion.

In some embodiments, at least some of the files (e.g., DICOM objects, DICOMDIR, viewers, etc.) that make up a volume can be written to an optical disc or memory stick and properly labeled and stored in a storage server for later retrieval. Accordingly, the volume **211** can be stored on removable media or in a content addressable storage (CAS). A volume dispatcher **213** can dispatch the volume **211** to a volume writer **215**, which stores the volume on a removable disk (e.g., a CD, DVD, Blu-ray, etc.) and/or on a removable memory (e.g., flash) device **219**. The volume **211** stored on a removable disk **217** or memory device **209**.

As mentioned above, the volume dispatcher **213** can store the volume **211** in a storage server **221**. In some embodiments, the storage server can be a CAS server. As is known in the art, CAS implements a mechanism for storing information for later retrieval based on information's content. CAS can be used for high-speed storage and retrieval of information hav-

ing fixed content. Storage server (e.g., CAS) can store the volume **211** in storage **223**, which can be on-line, near line, or off-line storage.

In some embodiments, decryption (i.e., access) passwords for the encrypted volume can be generated by the password generator **227** and stored in the application (or on the removable media) used to prompt the user **225** for a valid password to access the encrypted volume. A decryption password serves as a cryptographic key and is used by a decipher algorithm or decryption algorithm (i.e., the reverse of the cipher or encryption algorithm) to decrypt data stored on the encrypted volume. Decrypted data is also known as plaintext or unencrypted data.

The user of the encrypted volume (e.g., patient, referring physician, etc.) can insert the removable disc **217** or memory device **219** in a reader. An auto run file can start a GUI application that provides the address of the password web site **227** that can be used to retrieve the passwords. The user can visit the web site specified in the label or the disc or on the memory device and enter a sequence of characters (e.g., letters, numbers, symbols, etc.) that uniquely identify the disc. The user can then be prompted to enter some information about the contents of the encrypted volume (e.g., date of birth, date of exam, etc.). In some embodiments, the information requested from the user can be part of the DICOM data (e.g., a DICOM tag) and is easy for the user to recall.

Based on the information provided by the user, the password web site **227** can return a user password that can be used to gain access to the encrypted volume **211**. The user can enter the password in the field provided by the GUI on the volume. If the password is correct (i.e., matches the stored password) the utility can attempt to mount the encrypted volume **211** and execute the auto run in the container. If this operation completes, user's expectations can be similar to the one of opening a standard non-encrypted DICOM Part 10 volume. If, due to computer security policies the system is not able to mount the encrypted container, then the decrypted contents of the container can be copied to a disk drive in the computer (e.g., c:\temp\SPX).

A dialog box can be displayed indicating that the contents of the disk **217** or memory device **219** are unencrypted and are copied to the magnetic disk. In any event, encrypted data is made available in an unencrypted volume **231**. The auto run in the unencrypted volume **231** can be executed in order to bring up the same interface as provided by a standard non-encrypted DICOM Part 10 volume. When the encrypted volume **211** is ejected from the computer system an attempt can be made to delete the contents of the unencrypted volume **231** from the disk drive (e.g., c:\temp\SPX).

As explained above, in some embodiments, the encrypted volume **211** can be stored in the storage server **221**. Upon obtaining and entering the correct password, the user can contact an encrypted volume retrieval web site **229**. The volume **211** is retrieved from the storage server **221** (by accessing storage **223**) and mounted as described above.

FIG. 3 illustrates a flow chart for generating passwords for encrypted volumes in accordance with some embodiments. Encrypted volume generator **209** can encrypt the objects (and, optionally, DICOMDIR and viewer) **301** that will be placed in a DICOM Part 10 volume **211**. Password generator **303** can generate a set of passwords for the volume **211**. In some embodiments, password generator **303** can generate the following passwords using as base information DICOM tags and information from the license dongle of the system generating the encrypted volume:

Password Type	Count	Description
USER	1 per patient	Password generated using information from the license dongle and from the contents of one or more DICOM tags. Can be obtained from the web retrieval service.
FACILITY	1 per facility	Password generated using information from the license dongle. Can be obtained from a specialized web/utility retrieval service available to each facility generating encrypted volumes.
SENSOR	1	Password generated using information from the license dongle. Can only be obtained by authorized personnel from facilities generating encrypted volumes by contacting the provider.

Optional database 305, can store unique passwords to discs generated by a facility. Such passwords could, for example, be retrieved from the database by a web retrieval service 313 in order to allow access to encrypted volumes.

In some embodiments, a user can, at 309, write the encrypted volume 211 to a portable disc or memory device 311 and, optionally, properly label it. Further, the user can store the volume 211 permanently (e.g. to a storage server 223) to be remotely retrieved using a password. This option can eliminate the need for writing the contents of the DICOM Part 10 encrypted volume to a portable disc or memory device 311.

FIG. 4 illustrates data that can be included in a DICOM Part 10 encrypted volume 211 according to some embodiments. The encrypted container can hold a standard non-encrypted DICOM Part 10 volume including an auto run file which would bring up the interface (e.g., DICOM viewer, HTML page, etc.) typically provided for the application. The unencrypted portion of the volume can hold files that allow auto run of a utility that:

Displays the address of a web retrieval service for obtaining a password for the encrypted volume.

Information that needs to be entered when prompted by the web retrieval service.

Prompt the user for the password provided by the web retrieval service.

The contents of the volume can:

- Be written to a CD, DVD or Blu-ray disc and optionally labeled.
- Be written to a portable memory device or flash type device and optionally labeled.
- Stored for retrieval using a password. This can eliminate the need to write a physical encrypted volume.

FIGS. 5A-5C illustrates a plurality of encrypted DICOM Part 10 volumes that can be generated according to some embodiments. FIG. 5A illustrates storing the contents for an encrypted volume 217A for future use. The contents can be written to any storage medium, such as an optical disc or magnetic disk drive, or can be directly downloaded via a network connection to a computer, and the like.

FIG. 5B illustrates a portable disk (e.g., Blu-ray, CD or DVD) to which the contents of the DICOM Part 10 volume 217B have been written. The other side of the volume can be used to hold an optional label for ease of volume identifica-

tion. FIG. 5C illustrates a portable memory device or USB flash drive holding an encrypted DICOM Part 10 volume 217C.

In some embodiments, the volumes 217A-217C store, besides the encrypted DICOM Part 10 information, one or more DICOM viewers and/or information for accessing a password retrieval service to gain access to the encrypted components using a password. In some embodiments, the volumes 217A-217C store DICOMDIR information.

FIG. 6 is a flowchart illustrating an example method for permitting a system 600 to access an encrypted volume 211. When the encrypted volume 211 is inserted into a drive, and if the auto run facility is enabled in the computer, a utility can be started, at stage 601, and display, at 603, information on how to obtain a password from a web retrieval service. If auto run is disabled a file (e.g., \README.txt) in the volume contains information on how to manually start the utility.

The utility can display, at stage 603, information on how to connect to the web site used to retrieve user passwords. If the system 600 allows it and is connected to the Internet, a link (e.g., www.dicomdisc.com/password) can automatically take the user to the web retrieval service.

At stage 605, the web retrieval service can prompt the user for the code assigned to it when the encrypted disc was generated. The code can be found printed on the disc or in an unencrypted file (e.g., \code.txt) in the volume. In addition, the user can be required to enter some confidential information that can be part of one or more DICOM tags (e.g., date of birth, date of exam, modality of exam, etc.).

In some embodiments, the provided information can be used by the web retrieval service, at stage 607, to generate a password. In a different embodiment, a security mechanism database can be used to look up and associate the password with the information provided by the user. In any case, a password (valid or invalid) can be returned. The purpose of invalid passwords is to delay the process of trial and error to obtain a password.

The password can then be entered, at stage 609, into a utility displayed by the encrypted volume. If the password is incorrect (i.e., does not match the password generated and returned at stage 607), after a delay in stage 611 the user can be informed of the failed attempt. The user can be prompted to enter a new password. In one embodiment, if too many failed attempts have been detected, the application may exit or no longer permit further attempts. This may be done to slow down the process of obtaining a valid password by trial and error.

After a valid password is entered the encrypted container can be mounted, at stage 613, as an unencrypted volume. In some computer systems for security reasons the mount volume operation can be disabled. In such cases the utility in the encrypted volume can copy, at stage 615, the contents of the encrypted volume 211 to a folder (e.g., c:\temp\SPX) in a disk attached to the computer system. The user can then be informed that the contents of the decrypted volume are now unencrypted in a folder in the computer. The user may wish to delete the contents of the folder when done accessing the DICOM data.

After the user gains access to the encrypted container or to a copy of the decrypted data the software can attempt, at stage 617, to auto run the standard application (e.g., an image viewer) pointed to by the auto run (e.g., \autorun.ini) file. At stage 619 the user can access the DICOM data.

After the user is done accessing the decrypted data and the encrypted volume is ejected at stage 621, direct access to the data can be terminated. An attempt can also made, at stage

623, to automatically delete the contents of decrypted data if written to a folder in a disk attached to the computer system (e.g., c:\temp\SPX).

FIG. 7 illustrates some steps taken by a system **700** for obtaining a password to access the contents of an encrypted DICOM Part 10 volume **211** in accordance with some embodiments. At stage **701**, the user can be directed to access a web retrieval service (e.g., www.dicomdisc.com/password) using a standard web viewer (e.g., Internet Explorer from Microsoft). If the autorun utility senses that the machine is connected to the Internet it can attempt to connect automatically.

At stage **703**, the user can be required to enter the code printed on the label of the Blu-ray, CD, DVD disc, portable memory device, or the code in a file (e.g., \code.txt located at the root directory of the encrypted volume **211**). The web retrieval service can, at stage **705**, prompt for confidential information known and easily recalled by the user (e.g., date of birth, type of exam, etc.).

At stage **709**, the web retrieval service can check if it is able to generate the requested password. If it is able to do so, it can generate a password or, in some embodiments, look up the password in a security mechanism database. At stage **711**, the password can then be presented on the screen or sent to the user via e-mail. As explained above, at stage **713** the user can enter the password in order to gain access to encrypted data. At stage **717**, user's access to the data is terminated.

If the password is not valid, the procedure can be repeated a few times at stage **707**. After a number of failed attempts the user, at stages **719**, **721**, and **723**, may not be able to request a password. At stage **725**, the user can be asked to try a different approach to obtain a valid password or the system **700** can decide not to try and terminate user's access at stage **717**. If a different approach is decided on by the system **700**, at stages **727** and **729** the user can be required to contact the facility that generated the encrypted volume. The contact information for the facility can be printed on the label of the Blu-ray, CD or DVD disc and or in a file (e.g., \contact_facility.txt) located in the root directory in the disc or memory device.

The facility that generated the encrypted disc volume can, at stage **731**, request information from the user. In some embodiments, it is up to the facility to decide if they would issue a password. If the facility decides to generate or look up a password at stages **733** and **735**, the medical facility can access a dedicated web site (e.g., www.datcard.com/password) or utility. At stage **737**, the password generated by the medical facility may not work if the information provided is incorrect. Accordingly, at stage **739**, the medical facility can contact the manufacturer of the software (e.g., DatCard Systems) and request a password using the code printed on the disc label and in a file at the root directory of the encrypted volume (e.g., \code.txt). As is explained above, at stage **741**, the provider can generate the password.

To avoid authentication issues, the password can be sent, at stage **743**, to a set of predefined e-mail addresses (e.g., filmroom@medicalfacility.org) associated with each specific medical facility. It can be up to the facility to provide the password to the user. At stage **733**, the medical facility can decide not to provide the password to the user and the session can be terminated at stage **717**.

FIG. 8 illustrates a block diagram of an example system **800** configured for secure storage and retrieval of DICOM data. As shown, the system **800** can include a PACS **807**, a portable recording medium **811**, a user **813**, a user terminal **815**, a password archiving and retrieval service **817**, and a network **821**.

As explained above, the PACS **807** is configured to receive data (e.g., medical data) from various modalities **101**, **103**, and **105**. Modalities can include medical imaging instruments, such as ultrasound, magnetic resonance, PET, computed tomography, endoscopy, mammograms, and HIS and RIS configured to provide patient data, such as medical reports in the HL-7 format.

The PACS **801** can comprise a portable digital recording medium production station **809** configured to record digital data onto the portable medium **811**. For example, the portable digital recording medium station **809** can be configured to record software such as a DICOM compliant image viewer onto the medium **111**. The software can allow a user to view medical image data on any general purpose computer. An example portable digital recording medium production station is described in U.S. Pat. No. 7,302,164 to Wright et al. (filed on Jan. 17, 2001) (issued on Nov. 27, 2007), which claims priority to Provisional Patent Application Ser. No. 60/181,985 (filed Feb. 11, 2000), both of which are hereby expressly incorporated by reference in their entireties.

The portable digital medium production station **809** is configured to write encrypted medical data to the medium **811**. Encrypted medical data can include data such as encrypted DICOM images, encrypted medical reports, and encrypted patient data. The PACS **807** can receive encrypted medical data directly from the modalities **101**, **103**, and **105** and write this encrypted medical data to the medium **811**.

In certain embodiments, the PACS **807** receives unencrypted medical data from the modalities **101**, **103**, and **105**. The PACS **807** subsequently encrypts the medical data before the portable digital medium production station **809** writes the medical data to the medium **811**. The PACS **807** can comprise a processor configured to encrypt the medical data using a certificate and/or a public key infrastructure.

The PACS **807** can comprise a processor configured to encrypt the medical data using a password-based encryption mechanism. The password-based encryption methods can be in conformance with the DICOM Part 10 standard and utilize DICOM CMS and PKCS #5 encryption. Of course, other forms of encryption and security mechanisms, such as SHA-1, MD5, RSA, AES, and DES can be employed in the embodiments.

The password can be generated by the PACS **807** randomly or, in certain embodiments, generated based on input by a user. One or more users **813** can optionally be provided with a copy of the password in various ways, such as an e-mail, postal mail, text messaging, etc.

The password can also be generated by and received from a password archiving and retrieval service **817** (described in more detail below) through the network **821**. In some embodiments, the password archiving and retrieval service **817** is provided with a copy of the password, preferably in an encrypted form, via the network **819**. For example, one or more users **813** can subscribe to password archiving and retrieval service **817**, and this subscription can cause PACS **807** to communicate the password to the password archiving and retrieval service **817**.

The portable digital medium production station **809** can be configured to write a security mechanism to the medium **811**. A security mechanism is a data structure configured to provide access to encrypted data. For example, the security mechanism can be a decryption mechanism. In certain embodiments, the security mechanism can comprise a certificate, a public key infrastructure, or a password, as described above. The security mechanism preferably can be stored in encrypted form on the medium. In certain embodiments, the PACS **807** can comprise a processor configured to encrypt the

security mechanism. Alternatively, the PACS **807** can be configured to receive the password in an encrypted form from the password archiving and retrieval service **817** through the network **821**.

The password archiving and retrieval service **817** can store a unique decryption key associated with the unique combination of user and medium **811**. For example, each medium associated with a user can receive a unique decryption key, which is stored in the security mechanism database **819** associated with the password archiving and retrieval service **817**. In certain embodiments, a unique decryption key is associated with every medium. A unique decryption key can advantageously permit the password archiving and retrieval service **817** to authenticate a medium or a unique combination of user and medium. In some embodiments, a unique decryption key is associated with each user and is stored on the medium **811** associated with (e.g., designated for) user.

Medium **811** can be any suitable medium for storing medical images and associated data. For example, medium **811** can include an optical medium such as a CD (e.g., CDROM, CD-R, CD-RW), a DVD (e.g., DVD-ROM, DVD-R, DVD-RAM), or Blu-ray. As another example, the medium **811** can be a portable memory device (e.g., memory stick, USB flash drive, etc.). Those of ordinary skill in the art will understand that any suitable portable digital recording medium can be used in the systems and methods disclosed herein.

A user **813** is any entity that has possession of the medium **811**. An example user can be; for example, a patient, a doctor or other medical professional, or an entity such as a hospital or clinic.

A user terminal **815** is any processing device comprising hardware and software capable of accessing the medium **811** and the medium's contents. For example, a user terminal **815** can be a PC having an optical drive configured to read a DVD or a USB drive configured to access a USB flash drive. One skilled in the art will recognize that other types of computing types, such as laptops, servers, mobile phones, etc., can be employed in embodiments of the present disclosure as part of system **800**.

A password archiving and retrieval service **817** is a service in communication with the user terminal **815** and/or the PACS **807** via the network **819**. Preferably, the password archiving and retrieval service **817** comprises a secure web site interface (e.g., www.dicomdisc.com/password) accessible by a user **813** via the Internet. The password archiving and retrieval service **817** comprises at least one security mechanism database **819** configured to store security mechanism data. The password archiving and retrieval service **817** can further comprise at least one processor configured to provide user services. For example, example services can include generating security mechanism data, such as a password or retrieving password data from the security mechanism database **819**.

The password archiving and retrieval service **817** can be configured with at least one user registration database and/or facility registration database configured to store registration data.

For user registration, a user **813** can submit user registration data to the password archiving and retrieval service **817**. Example user registration data can include name, date of birth, address information, phone numbers, job title, etc. The password archiving and retrieval service **817** can optionally authenticate the user using proven practices and third party information stores to ensure that the user registration data is authentic and/or authorized.

Upon successful registration, the user **813** can be granted access to the password archiving and retrieval service **817**. For instance, the password archiving and retrieval service **817**

can assign the user a unique code (e.g., user_id or facility_id) in the user registration database, which can be comprised by the security mechanism database **819**.

In some embodiments, a facility having multiple users and user terminals may register as a facility and utilize a facility identifier. Upon the receipt of a facility identifier (such as a facility_id), individual devices (e.g., portable digital recording medium production stations **809**) can then be registered for that facility. Information such as product name, product type and end users identifier within the facility can be stored in the database. In addition to this, unique information can be generated automatically from the device to produce a unique registration string, which is described further below. Upon receipt of this information, a unique code can thus be attributed to the device (device_id).

Registration of a device can be performed with the password archiving and retrieval service **817** and a unique registration string known only to the password archiving and retrieval service **817** and the device can be generated. Components that affect this registration string may be characteristics that are unique to the device being registered. For example, these components can include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Motherboard serial number;
- MAC address;
- Random generated mouse co-ordinates/pixel data;
- Public/private key;
- Timezone;
- CPU serial number;
- Hard disk serial number;
- Etc.

In some embodiments, password archiving and retrieval service **817** may gather this information from the device via communications protocols, such as TCP/IP and Windows Management Interface (WMI). Of course, those skilled in the art will recognize that a wide variety of data and algorithms may be employed in order to develop a unique registration for the device.

For a job submission, upon the receipt of a device_id, a device will attempt to submit a job to the password archiving and retrieval service **817**. In some embodiments, a job is the creation of the medium **811** by the portable digital recording medium production station **809**. The password archiving and retrieval service **817** may process this request in various ways. For example, the password archiving and retrieval service **817** may check to ensure that the device_id is a current password archiving registered device. In other words, password archiving and retrieval service **817** may check whether a user's or device's subscription to the service remains current or has not expired.

Next, password archiving and retrieval service **817** may check to ensure that the device claiming to use the registered device_id, is the same device that registered initially with the password archiving and retrieval server. The password archiving and retrieval service **817** may employ various techniques, such as hashing algorithms, digital signatures, etc. to authenticate a device and/or the user.

The password archiving and retrieval service **817** may then generate an internal job identification (e.g., job_id) comprising the product, password, and a unique string (e.g., a timestamp). The password archiving and retrieval service **817** may, if required, automatically produce passwords. The password archiving and retrieval service **817** can then return a unique code (e.g., a "NV" number) back to the device.

Registered facilities may authorize a user as being their facility's account managers (FAM). Such managers can run reports of encrypted data usage, registered devices and

13

backup status. FAMs may also be accountable for ensuring that the end users attributed to their facility are still valid and authorized to access encrypted data. For example, every month/week/request, a report from the password archiving and retrieval service **817** can be sent to the FAM showing them the users that they currently have and any requests related to those users. The report may permit the FAM to authorize individual or all end users as remaining current.

Should a facility choose to do so, regular backups, such as daily or weekly, may be uploaded to the password archiving and retrieval service **817**. In the event of a device failing, the password archiving and retrieval service **817** will make available these daily backups to a facility's IT staff in order to assist in the replacement of the device.

FIG. 9 illustrates a process **900** for accessing encrypted DICOM data stored on a portable medium **811** according to some embodiments. As shown at stage **901**, in order to access or view information on the medium **811**, the user **813** inserts the medium **811** into the user terminal **815**. The user terminal **815** may then determine that the medium **811** contains encrypted information and, optionally, that password archiving and retrieval service **817** can be communicated with if needed. As shown at stage **903**, initially, the user **813** can be prompted to provide the password to access encrypted medical data stored on the medium **811**.

For example, as explained above, the medium **811** can optionally comprise an embedded DICOM image viewer. In certain embodiments, the embedded DICOM viewer can be configured to recognize the medical data on the medium as being encrypted and prompt the user for the password.

However, the user may not recall or know the decryption (i.e., access) password. For example, the user **813** may have forgotten the password or misplaced it.

Alternatively, the user **813** may be a person other than the original person who received the medium **811**. For example, as explained above, the user **813** may be a doctor, nurse, or other medical professional who has been provided the medium **811** as part of treatment of a patient. Accordingly, as shown at stage **905**, the user **813** can optionally access a dialog that allows the user **813** to request the services of the password archiving and retrieval service **817**. As an example, in the dialog requesting the decryption password, as described above, a button can be provided labeled "Forgot Password" or "Request Password."

In order to access the medium **811**, the user **813** may provide certain information that identifies him or her. For example, upon detecting that medium **111** contains encrypted information, the user terminal **815** may read a network location, such as a uniform resource locator (URL) that allows the user terminal **815** to gain access. In response, the user terminal **815** may open a browser window or other application and provide an interface element, such as pop-up window, that prompts the user for some authentication information. The user **813** can then enter an e-mail address, general access password, or other unique credential(s), such as date of birth, an automatically-detected IP address, or information stored on the label of the medium **811**.

In the example of FIG. 9, as shown at stage **907**, the "Forgot Password" or "Request Password" button opens a web browser on the user terminal **815** directed to a secure web site associated with the password archiving and retrieval service **817**. As shown at stage **909**, at the web site the user **813** is prompted for an e-mail address and a general access password as login information.

Upon receiving these credentials, the password archiving and retrieval service **817** may be called, for example, via an API or other type of remote communication service. Through

14

this API or service, the credentials can be transmitted to the password archiving and retrieval service **817** via the network **821**.

As shown at stage **911**, the password archiving and retrieval service **817** will compare the supplied credential to the user registration data and make an authentication decision. If the supplied credential matches the user registration data stored by the password archiving and retrieval service **817**, the password archiving and retrieval service **817** may determine a unique decryption key and other types of information about the encrypted information stored on the medium **811**. In some embodiments, this can be achieved by analyzing the security mechanism stored on the medium **811**.

As shown at stage **913**, with this decryption key, the password archiving and retrieval service **817** may access the encrypted password embedded on the medium **811** via the user terminal **115** in communication with the network **821**. In some embodiments, this processing is performed automatically or without user intervention.

As an example, the password archiving and retrieval service **817** can determine if the user or machine is listed in the user registration database. If the user is authenticated, the password archiving and retrieval service **817** can then access the unique encrypted password embedded on the medium **811**.

As shown at stage **915**, the password archiving and retrieval service **817** may then provide the decrypted password to the image viewer in order to allow it to display and view the images. In certain embodiments, the user terminal **815** decrypts the encrypted medical data automatically. In certain embodiments, the user terminal **815** may automatically complete a prompted "password" field. The user **813** may then rely on this provided password to in order to view the encrypted medical data, without necessarily knowing the password. In some embodiments, the password archiving and retrieval service can communicate the password to the user **813** and the password is compared to a password stored in the security mechanism of the medium **811**.

Although the present invention has been described with reference to exemplary embodiments, persons skilled in the art will recognize that changes may be made in form and detail without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. For example, references to a web retrieval site or service made herein will be understood by a skilled artisan to encompass other remote access means such as electronic mail, instant messaging, text messaging, telephone, and the like. Accordingly, the scope of the present invention is defined only by reference to the appended claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A computer-implemented system for providing access to securely stored medical data comprising:

- a database configured to store a decryption password for decrypting encrypted medical data stored on a portable medium, wherein the decryption password is generated from a non-user ID, medically related information identified by a DICOM tag;
- a secure interface configured to authenticate a request for decryption of the encrypted medical data stored on the portable medium; and
- a password retrieval service configured to:
 - receive the authenticated request from the secure interface;
 - receive non-user ID, medically related information identified by at least one DICOM tag;
 - retrieve from the database a decryption password uniquely associated with the encrypted medical data

15

stored on the portable medium, wherein the portable medium is associated with one decryption password; communicate the decryption password for accessing the encrypted medical data stored on the portable medium;

5

access a security mechanism stored on the portable medium by comparing the communicated decryption password with a decryption key associated with the portable medium; and

when there is a match, transform the encrypted medical data stored on the portable medium into a format accessible by the user, wherein the decryption key is used to decrypt the encrypted medical data into plain-text.

10

2. The system of claim 1, wherein the secure interface is a secure web interface.

15

3. The system of claim 1, wherein medical data is represented in Digital Imaging and Communications in Medicine (DICOM) format.

4. The system of claim 1, wherein the non-user ID, medically-related information identified by a DICOM tag comprises the date of a medical exam.

20

5. The system of claim 1, wherein the non-user ID, medically-related information identified by a DICOM tag comprises the name of a physician.

25

6. The system of claim 1, wherein the non-user ID, medically-related information identified by a DICOM tag resides within encrypted medical data on the portable medium.

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16