

Eight Steps for a Successful EMR Implementation

The healthcare industry is in the midst of an exciting technology transformation. With governmental bodies, trade associations and the President calling out for widespread IT adoption, medical professionals are starting to heed these calls. Physicians of all stripes are beginning to trade in their paper charts for software applications that help improve patient care, yield greater efficiency and productivity, and boost revenue.

Doctors who find the most success choosing and then implementing their electronic medical record (EMR) applications follow a clear path and have a solid plan in place. The following are important steps to ensure a successful EMR implementation.

Do your research

The first step is to make sure the practice chooses the right EMR at the outset. While there are many choices available to physicians, select an EMR that is interoperable with other applications, Microsoft-based and therefore familiar and easy to use; has been certified by the Certification Commission for Healthcare Information Technology (CCHIT); and comes with local, 24/7 support.

This last point is very important. Local technicians who specialize in implementing and supporting a particular EMR have been trained to analyze the practice, make sure it is outfitted with the most appropriate technology (hardware and software), and provide support after installation.

Choosing an EMR provider that offers local support will not only guarantee and protect your EMR investment, it will also give you tremendous peace of mind.

Choose a positive team leader

Choosing a respected staff member and/or physician champion to rally the team, show enthusiasm and set expectations can make a huge difference. By continually reminding staff that EMR implementation will lead to greater efficiency while decreasing stress, those who are most nervous about the implementation, particularly staff who are weary of technology to begin with, will feel much more comfortable with the process. At the same time, team leaders should set clear goals for the group so that the staff understands what is expected of them.

Develop a project implementation plan

Spend some time with your EMR provider prior to implementation discussing how and when your new systems will be implemented, when training will be conducted for the staff, and how quickly you and your provider can get you up to your full patient load. Work with your provider to install your hardware during off hours and ensure that the training is performed by a professional who thoroughly understands the EMR you are purchasing. For doctors, much of the anxiety surrounding

EMR implementation centers on a fear that they won't be able to see their full patient load for quite some time after they start using their new EMR. It is our experience that when you combine an easy-to-use product and solid training, doctors should be able to see their full calendar of patients within 1-3 weeks depending on the size of the practice.

Select hardware from reputable manufacturers

The EMR software you'll be using will sit atop your network infrastructure which is your computers, laptops, scanners, printers, and other devices. While there are no shortages of manufacturers who produce this hardware, select well known brands for your practice. Hewlett-Packard, Panasonic, Fujitsu, Dell, and Cisco all are reputable brands that stand by their hardware with robust warranties.

Invest in training

Training is perhaps the most important part of the EMR implementation process. A good program will provide you and your staff with a full understanding of the features and functionality within your EMR. The EMR provider you work with should provide you with the training resources you need.

Part and parcel of a good training program is one-to-one script based interaction with you and your staff. Performed in this way, staff will have the opportunity to ask questions, share concerns and practice with the EMR. Online training resources, reading materials and other sources are nice complimentary materials but should not be your sole training program.

Another way to train the team is through the "train the trainer" approach. This method involves training an individual or two who then train the remainder of the team.

Have a plan for your paper

Laws regarding the destruction of medical records vary from state to state, but ultimately you will need to make a decision regarding how much of your paper will be kept and scanned, and how much will be shredded. While some practices feel most comfortable holding onto their records, others avoid storage costs completely by scanning all of their records into their electronic system.

Work with your provider to determine how much of your existing paper charts should be scanned into your system.

Choose an EMR provider that offers onsite and preventative support

It's vitally important that you select a vendor that provides local support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. While certain vendors sell remote support, the reality is that some problems simply can't be solved unless a technician is onsite. Certainly, most upgrades take some degree of onsite assistance for either the software or training on new features and functionality.

In addition, choose a provider who offers preventative support, which are often times referred to as "managed services." There is a lot that providers can do to assess your network infrastructure and make tweaks before problems arise. Ask about the preventative support methods and packages that are offered through your provider.

Find a good partner

Choosing an EMR provider is an important decision and one that deserves adequate consideration of many factors. Above all else, however, select a partner that promotes those values which will keep your EMR implementation moving forward successfully. Choose a partner who is positive, action-oriented, respectful of your investment and honest about costs and deadlines.

Follow the steps above and join the growing community of doctors who are saving time and money, increasing revenue and gaining peace of mind that their practice is in great shape.

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