



## Tips from Experienced EHR Users

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The best advice about selecting, implementing, and using an EHR often comes from healthcare providers who have been using the technology for at least a year. The following are some practical tips from experienced EHR users:

### On investing in an EHR:

- Define your expectations. Know why you are adopting an EHR and what results you expect to achieve once it's fully implemented.
- Ask vendors about any special promotions and discounts.
- Recognize that more appropriate coding and more accurate billing charge captures can result in a consistent increase in revenue.
- Determine your eligibility for BCBSRI's EHR Fee Increase Program for primary care providers and their grant funding (up to \$5,000) to offset EHR acquisition, training, and upgrade costs.
- Learn if you qualify for Tufts Health Plan RI's Physician EMR Incentive Program—a one-time incentive payment of \$750.
- Ask local banks about any special EHR loan programs. Webster Bank and Washington Trust are two financial institutions that have offered these low-interest loans.
- Talk to other EHR users about Return on Investment. The widely quoted rule of thumb is that practices recover their acquisition costs in 18 to 24 months.
- Learn about the Medicare and Medicaid EHR Incentive Programs, which provide up to \$44,000 and \$63,750, respectively, over several years.

### On selecting an EHR:

- Examine your workflow before you buy an EHR; use this opportunity to examine why you do what you do.
- Select an EHR certified by the Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT (ONC). A certified EHR is necessary to qualify for federal and local incentive payments.
- Ask other providers in your community and specialty about the system they use, the criteria they used for selection, and the benefits and challenges they have experienced.
- Browse medical society web sites for explanations of the EHR adoption process.
- Research and understand the pros and cons of the different EHR models: the client/server model and the application service provider (ASP) or software-as-a-service (SaaS) model.
- When you have determined your top three EHR choices, invite each vendor for a site visit. Make sure they present their products using patient data and CPT codes from your practice.
- Compile a list of screening questions that pertain to your practice workflow and ask each vendor the same questions.

### On implementing an EHR:

- Determine a core team of providers and staff that meets regularly to focus on the EHR implementation. Select a physician champion to lead the implementation process.
- Adapt the EHR into your workflow by analyzing every team member's responsibility and workflow.

- Envision the patient in the exam room in order to customize the system to your needs.
- Recognize that successful implementation takes personal time and commitment.
- Develop policies and procedures for various scenarios and recognize that learning to use an EHR is an ongoing process.
- Create generic templates for 10 to 15 common exams, and create a system to organize them.
- Allocate administrative resources to monitor electronic faxes and prescriptions to resolve issues as they arise.
- Plan regular staff meetings to discuss the implementation.
- Require each physician to attend formal training on the system.
- Remember that a successful EHR implementation is 75% preparation and process and 25% technology. A lesser system well-implemented will get better results than a great system poorly-used.

### **On going “live” and achieving maximum benefits:**

- What works best will vary from office to office—just be sure to set a date to go paperless.
- Prepare for a temporary slow-down in productivity by either reducing the number of patients seen each day or by extending office hours while getting comfortable with your EHR.
- Be prepared for frustrations as you learn your new system, but realize that it will ultimately make your practice more efficient.
- Get organized before you implement an EHR. If you are disorganized with paper charts, you will be disorganized with an EHR.
- Identify “super-users” to support other staff and answer questions after the implementation.
- Plan to invest the time necessary to customize the system for the needs of your staff and the practice.
- Maintain an open, positive environment with scheduled time to discuss the implementation and any changes in strategy.
- Use multiple training opportunities—from group sessions to e-learning to one-on-one sessions.
- Check if your vendor offers user groups and online user forums—these are great ways to learn shortcuts and solutions from other providers.
- Commit to continued adoption of vendor upgrades, ongoing trainings, and improvements to hardware and software.
- Take time for office celebrations when you reach important milestones!