



EHRs: Selecting the Best One for Your Practice

Selecting an EHR system that is right for your practice requires thorough research and a clear understanding of your needs and goals. The more you understand about how you work and what you want, the more likely you are to select the best one.

Seek advice from other providers in your specialty

EHRs are designed for specific numbers and types of users. Ask other providers in your specialty about the system they use, the criteria they used for selection, and the benefits and challenges they have experienced. These providers will probably tell you what they would do differently and what steps they felt were effective. Most are willing to give you a demonstration of their EHR. Ideally, you should look at three EHRs to get a feel for the various workflows. Download and bring with you *25 Questions to Ask Other Providers about their EHR* from *Knowledge Center Resources* at www.DocEHRTalk.org.

Determine your technology needs

A *client/server* EHR model is a system installed in and managed by your office. It requires a number of components, based on your practice size and workflow, including file servers; workstations, tablets and/or laptop computers; and networking hardware (hubs, routers, cables, etc.). This choice offers depreciation savings, but carries high upfront costs and ongoing support from internal or external IT staff. A client/server model allows you control of your data, but you are responsible for maintaining data security.

An *application service provider* (ASP), or software-as-a-service (SaaS) model hosts software on a remote system and offers you access as a regular subscription fee that covers hardware and software. With an ASP, there are no high up-front expenses, ongoing costs are consistent, and your ASP provider is responsible for data backup and security. Some ASP and SaaS EHRs offer free trials; all you need is an Internet connection to try these systems.

**RI REC has
evaluated software
vendors and pre-
qualified them to
participate in our
Marketplace.**

Use our Vendor Marketplace

RI REC maintains a marketplace of pre-qualified EHR software vendors and technical service consultants. It provides an unbiased and structured way to review and compare the cost and functions of products and services to determine the EHR software, technical consultants, and HISP services (to use Direct Messaging) that are the best fit for your practice.

RI REC has negotiated discounts on pricing, contracting and service-level criteria. Vendors use a standard or standard-with-modifications end-user license agreement, so you can objectively compare EHR software contracts. The marketplace's EHR selections include those that have the necessary technical capabilities and functions needed to achieve meaningful use. Review profiles of RI REC Vendor Marketplace participants at www.DocEHRTalk.org.

Request vendor demonstrations

When you have determined your top three EHR choices, invite each vendor for a site visit. Ensure that each presentation focuses on your needs by providing the vendor with sample clinical information from your practice ahead of time and requesting its use as examples. Do a quick analysis of your practice's most frequently used current procedural terminology (CPT) codes, and ask the vendor to illustrate how a template for documenting some of these codes might look, whether users can create templates, and what is involved in constructing a template. See *25 Questions to Ask EHR Vendors* at www.DocEHRTalk.org.

Invite vendors to present their products using sample patient data and CPT codes from your practice.

Ask about available interfaces

Interfaces allow systems to communicate with each other. They improve efficiency, minimize the need for data entry, and allow for the clinical quality reports needed to meet meaningful use objectives. Interfaces allow for the structured data needed for reporting that are not possible with scanned documents.

An interface can be uni-directional (eg, lab data are reported directly to an EHR but tests are still ordered using paper) or bi-directional (lab tests are ordered and results are reported electronically in the EHR). Check if your lab and other vendors have interfaces with the EHR products you are considering and if there are any associated fees. Also, check for interfaces to any software and products that are important to your practice, such as practice management systems, e-prescribing, medical devices, and speech recognition software (eg, Dragon's Naturally Speaking).

You must use an ONC-certified EHR to meet meaningful use requirements and qualify for incentive payments

Verify certification

The Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT (ONC) has established standards to ensure that EHR products have the technical capabilities and functions necessary for healthcare providers to achieve Meaningful Use Stage 1 objectives. The EHR you choose must be certified by one of the six current ONC-Authorized Testing and Certification Bodies to qualify for Medicare or Medicaid EHR incentive payments and local incentives from health insurers. Currently, there are more than 500 certified EHR products (complete EHRs and EHR modules). To learn if the EHRs you are considering are certified, visit <http://onc-chpl.force.com/ehrcert/CHPLHome>. To learn more about EHR certification, visit www.DocEHRTalk.org.