

Implementing an EMR system into your Practice in 10 Steps

By Rodney S. Laval, CPA

Implementing an electronic medical records (EMR) system into your practice is a daunting task. It can be like changing a tire – on a car traveling down the highway at 60 miles per hour. There is buzz that government will mandate these systems sometime in the near future. In an attempt to get ahead of the curve, many practices are implementing these systems now. The following suggestions will help you and your practice with the drastic changes that will occur during implementation of an EMR system.

1. **Be prepared.** Your practice is about to undergo a major change. Be sure that you are personally ready for it as your day-to-day activities will be greatly affected by the system.

2. **Explain changes to your patients.** Many of your patients will be positive about the change. Ensure that you let your patients know that the office is going through a transition, and they should expect some delays or longer visits while the system is implemented. The open communication with your patients will be appreciated and will help ease your office through the transition.

3. **Depend on your staff.** Your staff is dedicated to the success of your practice. Be sure that they are given the authority, responsibility and notice necessary to provide comments and suggestions about the implementation. Each office member has a specialty and may have insight that others do not.

4. **Choose the right EMR system.** When deciding to implement an EMR system, be sure that you evaluate the software fully. Do not invest in a system that will not provide the functionality that your office needs. Develop a list of necessities that your EMR system must have.

5. **Remain positive.** Your staff will need encouragement that the EMR system implementation is worthwhile and all is going as expected. If you are discouraged, worried or upset, your staff will notice and productivity and morale in the entire office will be affected. You are the leader of your office and your staff will respond to your attitude.

6. **Learn the system.** As an example for your practice, you must set the example by learning the system. By no means are you expected to learn the whole system before your entire staff does, but you need to be committed to learning how to use the system. You and your staff should plan to learn the system incrementally.

7. **Reduce volume.** While you are implementing the system, you will need to have extra time to see patients and to learn the system. We recommend that you build this reduced volume into the budget. Also, taking the necessary time now to fully integrate the system will help your office transition to a full patient load once the office has learned it.

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8. **Pay attention.** You must take the training sessions on the EMR system seriously. You are the student and you should ask questions until you fully understand how to use the system. Be sure that you attend all of the training sessions that you are expected to attend and be present when the implementation team is installing the system in your office as you will be able to gain more practical training at that time.
9. **Preload is important.** Many offices that implement EMR systems do not take the preload sessions seriously enough. These sessions will impact the convenience of the system as well as your patients. Accurately putting patient information into the system is important as it will list your patients' drug histories and allergies. Also, this session will upload the medication lists and office-specific information into your new system.
10. **Use the system.** Obvious? Yes. Ignored? Sometimes. Ensure that you begin by using the system specifically as taught for the first four weeks after implementation. There will be a learning curve as you are focused on the intricacies of the technology. Eventually, however, using the technology will become second nature – as long as you commit to using it in the first place.

Implementing an EMR system will affect nearly every aspect of your practice. It is important that the process is well-thought-out and that your entire office is committed to the change. For more information on how an EMR system can help your practice run more efficiently and profitably, please call a financial advisor today.