



# Happy Birthday, Meaningful Use: How Far Have Practices Come?

By Marisa Torrieri | July 13, 2011

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One year ago today, CMS birthed the 800-plus-page document outlining its Stage 1 “meaningful use” incentive criteria for EHRs.

The immediate results went something like this: Some practices set to work, while others flat-out refused to budge from their papery ways. Then there were those who put “shopping for an EHR” and “figuring out meaningful use” on their to-do lists.

Still, first birthdays are momentous occasions — times to reflect on the 365 days that have passed and consider what the future will bring. (Check out this [informative timeline](#) for a rehashing of the year’s most important moments in meaningful use). To discuss how far practices have come with EHR adoption and meaningful use, as well as what the future holds, we called upon healthcare consultants and EHR vendors to comment.

One thing everyone agreed on is that more practices are adopting EHRs. According to our [2011 Technology Survey](#), conducted in the first quarter of this year, 55 percent of practices have fully implemented EHRs or use a hospital- or parent company-supplied EHR, up from 48 percent last year. Most experts agree that number has likely increased in the three months since the survey was taken.

“Practices are actively responding to the incentives — just looking at the number of primary care docs signed up within Regional Extension Center program gives you a sense that many reluctant practices are taking the EHR leap,” said healthcare consultant Bruce Kleaveland.

In turn, vendors have done a good job to keep up with the demand, noted Brad Boyd, vice president of consulting firm Culbert Healthcare Solutions.

“It has been an incredibly busy year for EHR vendors, both on the sales and implementation fronts,” said Boyd. “A particular challenge has been to recruit and train employees to keep up with the resource requirements generated from their sales activities. Fortunately, most vendors have done a nice job of developing focused methodologies to implement or upgrade clients to MU-certified versions of their software, which has enabled them to support the increased volume of work without sacrificing the quality of the implementations.”

Joel Andersen, president of EHR provider ClearPractice, said he has seen a large influx of practices starting their EHR evaluation process in preparation for meaningful use.

“The majority of volume has begun in the past few months, now that physicians are seeing the first meaningful use installment checks being received by the early EHR adopters,” said Andersen. “There is however still a great deal of indecision among groups on what solution to choose. A challenge with this is heightened given so many EHR solutions currently available.”

Charlie Jarvis, vice president of healthcare services and government relations at EHR provider NextGen, also said he is seeing EHR interest among practices pick up in the last few months.

“We’re seeing meaningful use as a key driver of new EHR adoption and replacements,” said Jarvis. “But there is still a large percentage of providers out there evaluating systems and considering their options.”

In the year ahead, the pressure will mount for practices that haven’t started implementation yet but desire meaningful use incentives, says Keith Slater, vice president and general manager of EHR provider Henry Schein MicroMD.

“It’s important that a practice understand that if they are starting their EHR selection journey today, implementation will not happen next week,” said Slater. “Practices should take the time to select an EHR that is not just ONC-ATCB certified, but one that is easy to use, has specialty-specific functionality and has flexible setup to allow for unique practice-specific workflows.”

*Where is your practice in terms of adopting an EHR? What do you expect in the year ahead? Post your comments below.*