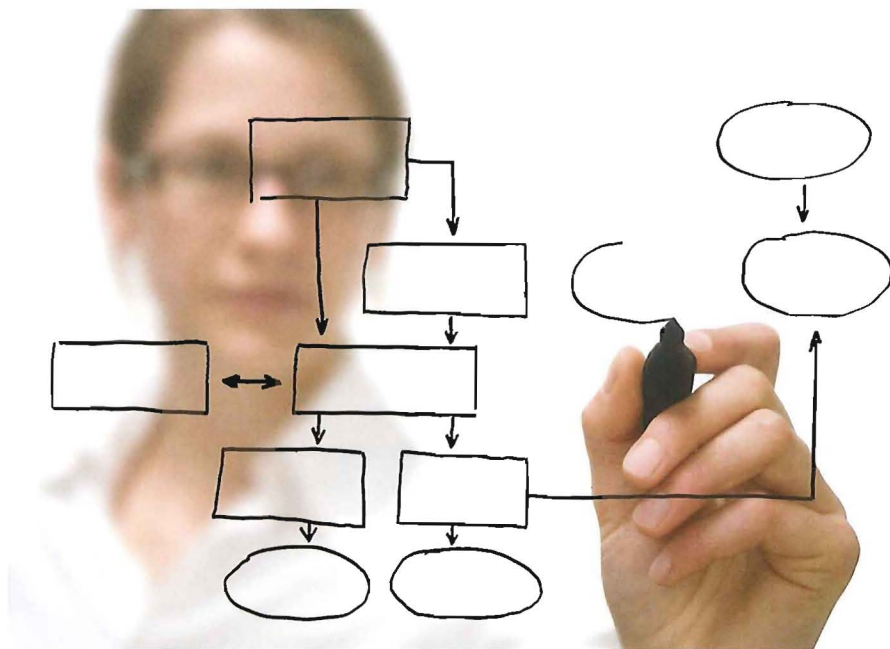# Tips for Successfully Selecting and Implementing EMR

by Keith Slater

Practices may have different reasons for wanting to implement Electronic Medical Records (EMR) software. It can be a step for first time adoption, or to replace their current EMR with a new one. The planning and timing are both critical to a successful implementation that meets practice goals. The decision to adopt an EMR can be motivated by many factors, including , securing CMS incentives, improving clinical and administrative efficiencies or ensuring compliance with new regulations, (such as the introduction of ICD-10). EMR implementation and ease of use can make or break the successful adoption by providers. With the push for practices to go electronic, practices and their EMR vendors are often faced with a time limitation in which to complete an implementation. This is especially notable when enrolled in one of the CMS EHR Incentive Programs. You can improve your chances for a successful EMR implementation by planning your practice's selection and implementation process well in advance of your projected implementation date. Read on for some tips on successfully selecting and implementing EMR.

Understand the timing: Start the EMR selection process early

In 2011, many available CMS EHR incentives were based upon calendar year implementation. The larger payouts were designed to encourage early EMR adoption. These incentives were a driving force behind purchase decisions and implementation timing for many practices. Vendors certainly expect this to continue. Many vendors are experiencing an influx of new clients eager to take advantage of the incentives. They must commit many hours of customer service to each client to ensure proper training and successful implementation. This can be especially true if the practice is not properly prepared for the transition. Selecting an EMR vendor early will allow for the required time to successfully organize and manage the initial implementation and training, including time for providers to adjust to new clinical workflows and documentation requirements. Early planning allows providers and their staff to evaluate their paper workflow and ensure that, as much as possible, it is translated into an efficient electronic workflow. It can be challenging for the practice and vendor

to agree on implementation times that work best for both. The practice may need to find a lull in which they're comfortable completing the go-live. The vendor may have to work around other practices already in line with go-live dates. This is especially critical in the first years of achieving meaningful use or when attempting to meet a new government requirement as the rules are new to everyone. Ultimately, planning ahead is a key element to ensuring that the initial "go-live" event is as successful as possible. Delays in selecting a vendor can compress this critical planning time, and only increase the chance for a potential failure.

Select an EMR to meet the specialty's needs and objectives

Selecting an EMR that meets every need of a healthcare organization can be challenging. Small practices do not need the enterprise-wide systems offered by hospitals and large healthcare systems that contain features for every contingency. Opt instead for an EMR that is easy to use, yet powerful in its feature sets. Work with potential vendors to simulate real examples of what happens in your practice. Look for an EMR that is flexible in its administration, documentation methods and functionality. Make sure that the system meets most of the needs and workflow within your specialty. Request a software demo to determine if the EMR is a fit for your specialty, as well as your organizational size, type and objectives. Practices should also look to partner with an EMR vendor with integrated practice management software, established implementation and training programs, and a reputation for providing ongoing technical support and product upgrades. This will ensure that your system will continue to grow with your practice.

With a well planned implementation and the establishment of consistent, periodic monitoring, your practice can meet all of your EMR objectives with minimal disruptions.

Select an EMR to help achieve meaningful use and regulatory requirements

Achieving meaningful use can sometimes require changes to existing clinical procedures. No provider wants to face a situation in which they assumed they were correctly using the EMR to meet requirements when, in fact, they weren't. Make sure that you consider how the EMR you choose will integrate with your current procedures. With hundreds of EMRs in the market today, choosing software that appears to meet your specialty workflow needs is just the beginning. You must also be sure that the vendor you choose has shown ability and commitment to keep software current and provide upgrades to comply with the required functionality through all the stages of Meaningful Use and the recent EDI ANSI 5010 introduction. They should be prepared to adapt for upcoming regulatory requirements, such as the introduction of ICD-10 into their products. Do your research, ask for referrals and speak to other Practice Managers before you settle on a vendor.

Appoint an "EMR Champion"

No one knows your practice better than you do! During the vendor selection process consider assigning an "EMR champion" to serve as the overall "project manager" to facilitate the vendor selection, contract and implementation process. These responsibilities should include; securing the staff input toward the requirements you are seeking in a vendor, identifying the challenges the practice has with managing paper charts and determining "need to have" versus "nice to have" functionality. This information can significantly impact the system requirements and the financial budget. The budget includes the software pricing, new or upgraded hardware and networking equipment and additional support services offered by the vendor. Following the completion of software demos, the "project manager" should assist in reviewing the final contract to be sure that what you are purchasing meets all of your requirements. At this point, they can coordinate all of the information they have gathered from your staff and the vendor to set implementation goals and schedules that everyone can work with.

Monitor achievement of EMR goals.

Once the initial installation and "go-live" training phase is deemed complete, you should be well on your way to monitoring your goals for EMR usage. Are you attesting for meaningful use within a specific timeline? If so, you'll likely be managing daily/weekly/monthly monitoring and on-going education with your EMR users.

The practice will want to ensure that all clinical staff members with EMR data entry responsibility are kept apprised of the periodic results of the clinical quality measures and reporting metrics. A best practice recommendation would be to consider forming a committee that regularly reviews advanced "tips and tricks", shares knowledge of how best to navigate the software and evaluates common problems that may require a formal office policy or procedure. This will help you to monitor the effectiveness of your system and the ability to address the needs for additional training or software as they arise.

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Keith Slater
is Vice President and General Manager of Henry Schein MicroMD, a provider of simple, yet powerful EMR and Practice Management solutions helping to streamline operations for today's busy providers. For more information, visit www.micromd.com

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