

Critical Factors That Can Make or Break Your EHR Implementation



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Many people today have personal computers, yet only a small percentage of them understand and utilize the full potential of this technology. The same can be said for Electronic Health Records (EHR). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported in 2009 that 27% of physicians have a basic or fully functional EHR system. What's important to note is that "having" an EHR system is very different from "utilizing" the technology to its full potential. Physicians who fail to optimize their EHR are no different from people who use their personal computers for only the most basic functions. Each of them misses out on the real value of the technology they possess.

It's no secret why many medical practices under utilize their EHR technology. It's because it's not a simple process. In fact, it's quite complex but this should never be a deterrent to achieving the goal of full optimization. A successful EHR implementation renders benefits for providers, staff and patients including improved care coordination and communication, increased quality and safety and positively impacts return-on-investment. Unfortunately, not every EHR implementation is successful. We've assisted many practices through their EHR implementation and identified factors and conditions that, when present, facilitate successful implementation but when absent, inevitably leads to serious problems.

CRITICAL FACTORS RELATIVE TO THE EHR PROCESS ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS

The transition to EHR is a monumental change. A common challenge physicians and administrators face is correctly communicating the nature of the changes before, during and after they happen. Practices that regularly inform their staff, provid-

ers and patients about the benefits of EHR including realistic timeframes involved are more likely to obtain a genuine buy-in from them during implementation. The fear of change and the unknown becomes manageable when everyone involved understands what's taking place now and in the future. We've also learned without such readiness and communication, practices may experience resentment, subversive sabotaging of the implementation and an unwillingness to change the way the practice operates. We've worked with practices that opted for a phased-in approach to implementation, gradually incorporating aspects of the EHR over a period of time which helps ease the transition phase.

RELIABLE INFRASTRUCTURE

It's not uncommon for a practice to "ramp up" their IT infrastructure to accommodate EHR demands. They do so by working with trusted IT vendors that have medical practice experience. Such vendors can provide a pre-implementation "readiness" assessment to determine if network or hardware upgrades are necessary. Many practices stumble because of faulty IT infrastructure and then jump blindly into an EHR implementation, both serious errors easily avoided with proper planning.

ALIGNING WITH LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS

Successful EHR implementations do not happen in a vacuum. Regional Health Information Organizations (RHIOs), medical societies, Regional Extension Centers (RECs), healthcare IT vendors and hospital systems are all valuable resources practices can connect with to ensure that they're leveraging all the field of health information technology has to offer. We have found

that physicians and administrators learn tips, tricks, and best practices from these stakeholders which are useful in their own implementations.

COMMITMENT TO WORKFLOW REDESIGN

Workflow is a critical component in an EHR implementation. Successful implementations involve workflow analysis for every department or clinical area early on in the process. Failure to address workflow issues leads to challenges that make the transition to EHR more difficult. When we see practices that simply automate their processes from a paper environment into an electronic format, they experience more frustration, decreased productivity, and overall dissatisfaction with the EHR.

The critical factors aforementioned merely scratch the surface of what goes into EHR implementations. We encourage practices to talk to their peers, seek out trusted resources and align with partners that have a proven track record of EHR implementation success. Whether your practice is already implemented, plans to implement or is still considering the options, knowing what works for others will help steer your practice towards success.



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The event will be held at:
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For information on registration, contact Linda Becker @ 585.738-7397 or visit www.healthcarebenefitsnetwork.com.

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