

# In Search of the Right EHR Vendor: HIM Director Leads the Way in Selecting the Right EHR

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*by Meg Featheringham, assistant editor*

One of Katherine Lusk's main responsibilities as director of health information management at Children's Medical Center of Dallas is managing and maintaining its electronic health record (EHR). "We have lab, x-ray, respiratory therapy, pathology, medication administration, electronic signature, and nurse's notes," she says. "Everything else is scanned." Lusk, RHIA, says that she "focuses on the EHR's output from a day-to-day basis along with the legal health record."

## Selecting an EHR Vendor

Although Children's Medical Center currently works from an EHR, Lusk says that the current system was built in a silo. "While it might work for a department, there are times it does not work well for other users of the information." Since Lusk began at Children's in 2002, she has had to deal with improvements to the EHR. "We have an electronic health record improvement project where we work clinic by clinic and discipline by discipline to try to improve the record--one long performance improvement project," she says.

That's why her organization is in the midst of making sure they have the right vendor, processes, and system. "We have a long-standing relationship with our current vendor. We've grown up together," she says. "We're looking to see if this vendor is the right vendor for us for the future."

Lusk and the other committee members selected to head this process are looking closely at interconnectivity as Children's is closely tied with the University of Texas Southwest Medical Center Campus. Another focus of their EHR selection process is relationships. "We started initially with a request for proposal but found that was not enough," she says. They then "gravitated to 17 distinct elements, including KLAS scores, Gartner's findings, and what kind of relationship they have with their customers," she says. "That's important to us."

## An Educational Process

Although Lusk admits that the process of selecting the right EHR vendor has been a learning process, she finds that it's also given her the opportunity to inform others in her organization of HIM's importance in implementing an EHR. "It's been an educational opportunity on what our discipline brings to the table," she says. "I'm really doing a lot of education on the fundamentals that we know intuitively but that other people don't really recognize."

The most challenging aspect of the selection process has been reminding those in her organization that the medical record is not just a means to enter clinical data. "Users struggle to understand the fundamentals of health information management," Lusk says. "The method of input and delivery has changed, but you still have to meet regulatory requirements, take a record to court, and communicate with each other."

## "Be Assertive"

For those HIM professionals whose organizations are transitioning to EHRs, Lusk recommends they "be assertive--show up to meetings whether invited or not." Initially, she had to invite herself to the organization's EHR meeting. After the organization understood what HIM had to offer, opportunities to participate increased. "Sometimes, the organization doesn't recognize our value because we've been in the background," she says. "We're very gracious professionals, and we're not always assertive... At times that doesn't serve us well."

Lusk finds that making sure HIM professionals are at the table will ensure that the EHR meets everyone's needs.

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