Practice Toolkit: Resources to Assist Physician Office EHR Selection and Implementation

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It is widely known that health IT adoption has lagged behind other industries. For more than a year, the federal government has encouraged strategic efforts to foster IT adoption.[1] And it appears that momentum is picking up in physician practices. According to the Medical Group Management Association, one in five group physician practices in America has some sort of electronic record with a database containing patient medical and demographic information. In addition, the association reports a steady movement toward a paperless office and full use of electronic health records.[2]

That is good news when you consider that the vast majority of patient care is delivered in physician offices. Technology benefits applied in the physician office setting could significantly improve quality of care and patient safety within the healthcare industry.

However, many physician offices have trouble selecting an EHR. David Brailer, MD, PhD, national coordinator for healthcare IT, names vendor selection as one of the challenges that medical groups find daunting.[3] And no wonder—a Google search for the terms "physician" and "electronic medical record" returns more than 200,000 links.

Looking for the Seal of Approval

Efforts are currently under way to certify electronic products for use in ambulatory care settings. Formed in July 2004, the Certification Commission for Healthcare Information Technology is working to create an efficient and credible method to certify healthcare IT products. This will help reduce the financial risk for providers when they invest in an expensive system. Not surprisingly, Brailer selected physician office EHRs as the first EHR product certification focus under the ambulatory care healthcare arena.[4]

However, Brailer made it clear that even when certification is available to assist physicians in EHR product selection, physician office staffs are generally not robust enough to take on the formidable task of EHR implementation. He asked the industry to recognize that challenge and assist with tools and resources to encourage adoption through operational changes.

HIM professionals have the knowledge and opportunity to assist physician office EHR selection and implementation. They can bring knowledge of health information processes and workflow into a new way of doing business, while ensuring quality information to support clinical database completeness and accuracy and pay-for-performance optimization.

This column outlines some of the numerous resources available to assist physician practices in identifying, evaluating, selecting, and implementing an EHR. The list offers HIM professionals resources to use in assisting physician practices with EHR selection and implementation. Following are the types of resources featured.

EHR public and private initiatives

Several government-sponsored and private initiatives are under way with an explicit purpose to equip physician practices with EHRs. These groups provide a wealth of information, typically well organized and available at no charge.

American Academy of Family Physician's Center for Health Information Technology-a major collaboration of physician organizations engaged in the effort to disseminate information to promote EHR adoption (http://www.centerforhit.org/).

California Health Care Foundation, in partnership with Community Clinics Initiative, is engaged in the California Community Clinics EHR Assessment and Readiness Project (http://www.chcf.org/documents/chronicdisease/ClinicsEHRAssessmentReadiness.pdf).

Certification Commission for Healthcare Information Technology-established to accelerate the adoption of robust, interoperable health IT throughout the US healthcare system, by creating an efficient, credible, sustainable mechanism for the certification of health IT products (http://www.cchit.org).

Doctor's Office Quality - Information Technology-a two-year special study demonstration that is designed to improve quality of care, patient safety, and efficiency for services provided to Medicare beneficiaries by promoting the adoption of EMRs and information technology in primary care physician offices (http://www.doqit.org/dcs/ContentServer?pagename=DOQIT/DOQITPage/PageTemplate).

eHealth Initiative is an independent, nonprofit organization whose mission is to drive improvement in the quality, safety, and efficiency of healthcare through information and information technology (http://www.ehealthinitiative.org).

EHR Collaborative-a group of organizations representing key stake holders, whose goal is to advance the adoption of information standards for healthcare (http://www.ehrcollaborative.org/index.htm).

Michigan Electronic Medical Record Initiative (http://www.memri.us/research.html)

Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology-established by executive order to facilitate the effective use of information technology and collaborate with the various sectors in the healthcare industry to advance widespread use of interoperable EHRs (http://www.hhs.gov/healthit/)

Internet EMR/EHR resources

There is abundant information available on the Internet, including how-to articles, buyers guides, best practices, worksheets, and other tools. We've compiled some of the most reputable sources for you and encourage you to use these as a starting point as you assist physician practices. In many of these sites you'll find additional links to other sites with valuable information. As with any Internet search, review information objectively and always consider the source. For example, look for advertisement labels and conflict-of-interest disclosures on all Web sites and articles.

American Academy of Family Practitioners articles and resources are available at http://www.centerforhit.org/x574.xml.

AHIMA articles and best practices available free to the public:

- "Core Data Sets for the Physician Practice Electronic Health Record"
- "State of the EHR: The Vendor Perspective"

AHIMA e-HIM resources available at http://www.ahima.org/infocenter/ehim/ [web page no longer available].

California Healthcare Foundation publications:

- "Electronic Medical Records: Lessons from Small Physician Practices" (http://www.chcf.org/documents/ihealth/EMRLessonsSmallPhyscianPractices.pdf)
- "Electronic Medical Records: A Buyer's Guide for Small Physician Practices." (http://www.chcf.org/documents/ihealth/ForresterEMRBuyersGuideRevise.pdf)

"EMR Shopping? Finding Your Way in a Crowded Marketplace." SHANDS Healthcare. (http://www.shands.org/professional/ppd/practice_article.asp?ID=178#)

England's NHS information policy background which describes the purposes and characteristics of patient record systems and examines the question of migration towards paperless practice and the education and training needs of paperless practices (http://www.dh.gov.uk/assetRoot/04/06/97/65/04069765.pdf).

Health Information and Management Systems Society additional resources available at http://www.himss.org/ASP/topics_ehr.asp.

"Interested in EMR Software? Look Before You Leap." ACP Observer, October 2003. (http://www.acponline.org/journals/news/oct03/emr_software.htm)

Medical Group Management Association resources:

- Research Connexion (http://www.mgma.com/research/emr.cfm)
- Electronic Medical Record (EMR) Checklist (ftp://ftp.mgma.com/pub/WEBMISC/Tools/EMR-checklist.pdf)

"Should I Buy an EMR Now? The Experts Weigh In" AMNews October 2004. (Open to AMA members and subscribers to AMNews) (http://www.ama-assn.org/amednews/2004/10/11/ bisa1011.htm)

Vendor resources and resources to identify and evaluate vendors

Many vendors have excellent materials; after all it is to their advantage to help you recommend the EHR that will be the best fit for a physician practice. A few vendor resources are included in our list. You'll find many more as you begin to investigate specific software products. We encourage you to use vendors' materials, but don't let vendors, particularly any one vendor, be your sole source of information. Seek confirmatory information and other more objective sources as well.

Vendors resources

Misys white papers:

- "Critical Success Factors for Practice-Wide EMR Implementations" (http://www.misyshealthcare.com/resources/whitepaper.pdf)
- "EMR Buyer's Guide: Considerations for Practices Evaluating EMR" (http://www.misyshealthcare.com/resources/emr+buyers+guide+white+paper+09041.pdf)

MedicaLogic (GE Medical Systems) peer advice on EMR implementation available at http://www.medicalogic.com/emr/peer_advice/.

Resources to Identify and Evaluate Vendors

AC Group reports evaluate leading electronic health and medical record applications (http://www.acgroup.org/pages/395598/index.htm)

EMR discussion forum available at http://www.emrupdate.com/forum/forum.asp?FORUM_ID=1

KLAS Specialty Reports-in-depth vendor performance reviews covering specific areas of interest to healthcare providers (http://www.healthcomputing.com/site/v2/aboutklas/whoweare.asp)

PhysiciansEHR.com vendor directory (http://www.physiciansehr.com)

Other resources and use cases

Lastly, seek out those who have paved the way and learn from their experiences. Take advantage of listserves to network with others working with physician practices and take the time to read case studies.

Searching for an EHR can be very time consuming. An individual physician practice may need to spend many weeks, even months, becoming familiar with the systems that are available and analyzing the group practice's needs and goals. Brailer has asked the industry to assist physician practices in this process, and HIM professionals are well suited to that role.

2004 Centricity Healthcare User Group Presentations available at http://www.emr.msu.edu/2004_chug_presentations_intro.htm.

Adler, Kenneth G. "Why It's Time to Purchase an Electronic Health Record System." Family Practice Management, November/December 2004. Available online at http://www.aafp.org/fpm/20041100/43whyi.pdf.

Hanson, Susan P. and Roy E. Schutzengel. "Pioneers and Perseverance." Journal of AHIMA 75, no. 1 (2004): 38-43. Available online in the FORE Library: HIM Body of Knowledge at http://www.ahima.org.

Moore, Pamela. "We Bought the Wrong EMR! Make the Right Choice the First Time." SHANDS Healthcare. Available online at http://www.shands.org/professional/ppd/practice_article.asp?ID=239.

Sittig, DF, Kuperman GJ, Fiskio J. "Evaluating Physician Satisfaction Regarding User Interactions with an Electronic Medical Record System." Proceedings from the 1999 AMIA Annual symposium: 400-4. Available online at http://www.amia.org/pubs/symposia/D005736.PDF.

Smith, David, and Lucy Mancini Newell. "A Physician's Perspective: Deploying the EMR." Journal of Healthcare Information Management 16, no.2 (Spring 2002): 71-79. Available online at http://www.himss.org/asp/ContentRedirector.asp?ContentID=15735.

"Your Guide to Implementing the EHR: AHIMA Work Groups Deliver Best Practices." Journal of AHIMA 75, no. 1 (2004): 26-31. Available online in the FORE Library: HIM Body of Knowledge at http://www.ahima.org.

Notes

1. Brailer, David, and Tommy Thompson. "The Decade of Health Information Technology: Delivering Consumer-centric and Information-rich Health Care." July 21, 2004. Available online at www.hhs.gov/healthit/documents/hitframework.pdf.

2. Versel, Neil. "One in Five Group Practices Now Uses EHRs." Health IT World, January 25, 2005. Available online at www.health-itworld.com/enews/01-25-2005_508.html.

3. Ibid.

4. For more information on the Certification Commission for Health Information Technology, including target dates for EHR certification, go to www.cchit.org.

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