

# Tapping HIM Expertise for Physician Practice EHRs

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by Wendy Mangin, MS, RHIA

Managing patient records has become more complex for medical practices. Electronic health records, quality reporting, and coding and documentation compliance all affect how a practice manages its patient information.

While improved information holds great promise for patient care quality, safety, and practice management efficiencies, it is well documented that the transition from paper to electronic is not easy, quick, or inexpensive.

## Drawing on HIM Expertise

HIM professionals can be a resource for physician practices in EHR selection and implementation because they understand practical information management issues, such as defining the legal electronic record, handling corrections or amendments, and workflow process design.

While small physician practices may not be in a position to hire an HIM professional, they can consider seeking advice from an RHIA- or RHIT-credentialed HIM professional in their community. An HIM professional could play an advisory role, such as providing input on which system to purchase or which features are “must-haves.” He or she could play a more active role, participating in the actual EHR implementation.

Either way, this is an excellent opportunity for HIM professionals to contribute unique information management skills in this exciting transition period.

## Spreading the EHR Word

Since most hospitals are more advanced in their use of EHRs, physicians may look to HIM professionals who work in hospitals to help them move from paper to electronic records. With recent modifications to the Stark self-referral laws, hospitals are considering whether they can provide financial support to physician practices to aid in this process. Once those details are worked out, the door could open wider to EHRs becoming a reality in many practices.

At my hospital, we have formed a group of interested physicians and representatives from hospital administration, information systems, and HIM to discuss how physician practice EHRs might come to fruition in our community. Our initial meetings centered on the needs of the various physician practices related to information technology and managing health information.

The physicians are keenly aware that whatever system they choose must be interoperable to allow information exchange between the physician practice, the hospital, and other care settings in our community. There is discussion about the importance of using a certified EHR to advance common standards and interoperability.

## Fostering Positive Relationships

Author James Belasco in his book *Teaching the Elephant to Dance* tells the story of Dr. Cooley, a famous brain surgeon. One day, while following Cooley on his rounds, Belasco saw the surgeon talk to a man mopping the hallway. They talked for nearly 10 minutes before Cooley dashed into the operating room.

Belasco commented on the length of the conversation. The man mopping the floor said, “Dr. Cooley talks to me quite often.” The author asked, “What do you do at the hospital?” The man replied, “We save lives.” Nurturing and building these positive relationships with physicians serves to remind me of AHIMA’s vision: Quality healthcare through quality information.

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