10 Steps for EHR Success

Clientfit
Technology Consulting

Introduction

Implementing an electronic health records system does not have to be a painful process. By using the right methods and our strategies, the implementation process can be streamlined so your practice starts seeing the benefits immediately after switching from paper records. Many practices view this task as a chore because they fail to properly plan and execute their implementation. With this guide you can trust that your EHR implementation will be a success. Furthermore, once you begin using an EHR system, your staff can focus less on paperwork, automate manual tasks, and spend more time with patients.

1. Choose an EHR that is right for your practice.

Choosing an EHR is the most important step of your implementation process. Not only do you need to make sure that the EHR system is easy to use and cost effective, but also that it fits the needs of your office. Make sure your new EHR system has all the features you need to smoothly implement the system into your daily office routine. Some systems were not developed with provider-patient work flow in mind and therefore do not offer a good user experience, so make sure to check reviews. Ask questions such as:

- Does the system allow for connection to labs, imaging centers and pharmacies?
- Can you easily upload and attach documents?
- Will the EHR work on your current computer system?
- Will have access to training and support on demand?
- Will I need to purchase additional servers and equipment in order for your EHR to run?
- Does your EHR meet the needs of your specific specialty?

Don’t be hesitant to take staff opinions into account when selecting a system. Remember, you are not the only one using the system, and in order for implementation to be successful everyone must be on board.

2. Make sure your EHR is scalable and adaptable.

Something else to consider is the adaptability of your system. With the speed technology is moving, it is important that your system is equipped to keep up with improvements. For example, you may want to choose a system that is outfitted to work on tablets, and is accessible via a data cloud so that you may log in from any computer. Further your EHR should be able to keep up with industry changes such as ICD-10 and Meaningful use without the need to purchase new software or costly upgrades. The best systems will help adapt practices to the changing environment of healthcare without additional work or costs.

3. Plan ahead: make a strategy for your EHR roll-out.

You chose your EHR system based on your office needs and verified its meaningful use eligibility, now what?

DON'T jump right in to implementing the system, chances are if you do this the work flow in your office will slow significantly due to learning curves and paperwork back up.

DO set a specific timeline and goals for your system implementation. Make sure you have a plan for your paper medical records, and develop a process by which new records will be created, modified, and stored digitally. Set up specific deadlines for training and practice, and make sure all users are compliant before going live.

DON'T get distracted by features your office does not need.

DO keep it simple. Make sure to connect with diagnostic and imaging centers as well as pharmacies that you already use. If you don't want to use a tablet or have an online appointment feature for patients, you don't have to set it up. Also, decide if it is best for your office to go completely paperless, for some offices it may not be feasible to go completely digital. Make sure to adapt your system to your needs, not what appears to be the most "high-tech" approach.

DON'T forget to inform all associated parties about the switch. It is important that your office staff know how to use the system, as well as billing and accounting.

DO familiarize yourself with the meaningful use core measures. These are the rules your practice must follow while using the EHR in order to qualify for incentives. An overview of the core measures can be found at the CMS website.

Many EHR systems help you meet Meaningful Use requirements, so if you are eligible it is best that you choose a system that will best help you meet these guidelines as soon as possible. Make sure the system you select is certified for at least meaningful use stage 1 and 2. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) have divided meaningful use into 3 stages.

You can visit the CMS website to check your eligibility.

4. Pick a Go Live date.

It is imperative that your practice picks a go live date and stick to it. Set interim implementation and training milestones so that you can accurately assess your practice's progress. Depending on your incentive program you may have a deadline to begin using certified EHR technology. Picking a go live date will ensure that your practice will be up in running well before your reporting period beings.

5. Assign roles for EHR use.

Assigning roles will not only allow your to streamline your EHR use, but also limit the amount of exposure of different people to confidential medical records. If people are given specific tasks within EHR use, then less time and energy will be wasted on repeatedly performing the same task. For example, the employee who receives labs can be placed in charge of monitoring the labs that come in digitally and those that must be scanned manually. They can also track missing orders and update the system as they are received. This type of system can be used for all aspects of the EHR, including appointment scheduling and confirmations, as well as chart update.

6. Make sure all users receive comprehensive training.

Remember, different people will have different adoption rates, based on their technology competence. Identify which people seem to learn easily and early, and allow them to model for the slower learners. Do not waste time reteaching those who already know how to use the system. But, make sure that everyone confidently understands how to navigate the system easily before moving forward with implementation. Training is most effective when it is conducted by role. Focus on teaching employees how to do their day to day job duties in the EHR rather than overloading them with all the features in the EHR.

7. Know your EHR.

Doing mock run-throughs of your practice work flow using EHR is a great way to get used to your new system and identify any problems before roll-out. Practices can also map out their day-to-day tasks in the paper world and explore how the EHR can automate or digitize these tasks.

8. Be flexible.

Every EHR system will have obstacles to implementation; no system is 100% perfect from the get-go. Equipment malfunctions, staff turnover, and other situations all provide opportunities for implementation to become derailed. It is important to take note of these situations to better prepare you for future problems.

As important as it is to stick to your implementation timeline, ultimately it is more important that you meet your designated goals, even if it takes multiple practice runs and training sessions to get up and running. It is more important to be confident that your office will run smoothly once you go live, than to go live early and become bogged down by user errors.

9. Make a top down commitment.

As the leader of your practice, you must set a standard for how your new EHR system will be used. This will ensure maximum compliance from your employees when the system goes live. Your attitude towards implementation will trickle down and impact your staff's attitude as well. Remain positive and hopeful that your practice will have a successful implementation.

10. Roll-out and monitoring.

As you implement your new EHR ask the question "Does this system improve our ability to deliver patient care? Make sure that your new system allows your office to run smoothly, and be sure to pinpoint where gaps in efficiency exist. For example, if you are having trouble uploading labs, imaging, or prescriptions, find out if there is a way to directly connect to these centers. Make sure you are using all available features that are available, and keep track of new updates as they are released.

Conclusion

Remember, EHR companies design their programs to be dynamic, so improvements and changes to the system may occur over time. Most importantly, someone should be in charge of monitoring meaningful use progress. One of the main goals of this project is to earn incentives and avoid penalties. If meaningful use is not achieved all your practice's hard work may be without financial benefit.

Further consider the time and money saving benefits an EHR will bring to your practice. There is no question your practice will see an increase in productivity and the quality of care your practice delivers.

Client Success Story

"We had no technology prior to working with ClientFit. Our computers were running outdated software such as Windows XP our network was unprotected, and we were not backing up important data. Technology just wasn't a priority for our practice. With all the new health care rules and regulations and our recent decision to implement an electronic medical records system, we made it a priority to get our IT infrastructure up to date.

ClientFit made the whole process easy and did most of the work for us; we could not have made the transition without their help. They started by helping us select the right technology for our practice. We needed new laptops, desktops, tablets, and a wireless network for our EHR system, which was a huge project in itself. They recommended that we use Practice Fusion's free EHR for our practice. ClientFit mapped our entire EHR implementation process and helped us tailor the EHR to our practice work flows. Since the EHR was completely free and would serve our needs, we were able to invest the money we saved into upgrading our computer systems.

Prior to switching to EHR our practice spent a lot of time searching for patient charts and we were still scheduling patients in a paper day planner. Since ClientFit helped us implement Practice Fusion things get done faster. We are saving time, which is resulting in dollar savings for the practice. ClientFit held our hand the whole time until we were able to meet the 90-day criteria for meaningful use, and were available again during our second 90-day period. To date our practice has earned $27,000 dollars in incentive money thanks to ClientFit's help."

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