

Advice for physicians considering implementing an EMR

From Barbara Drury, independent EMR consultant and president, Pricare, Inc.

1. Ask yourself what you're hoping to fix. Do you want to be able to read charts from home in the middle of the night? Do you want a system that will also make billing easier?
2. Make a shopping list of the criteria your system must have. COPIC publishes a list of 255 criteria, titled "Benchmarks for Electronic Medical Record Systems," that is a good starting point. (The publication is free to those who are COPIC-insured; others may purchase a paper or electronic copy.)
3. Sit down with your staff and discuss your shopping list. Envision how you might use the system, and add any additional needs or suggestions from staff to your list.
4. Use the list to talk with vendors. Show the vendor everything you'd like your EMR to do, and make sure their product can do it by seeing key features demonstrated live.
5. Spend time with a peer who has an EMR. Shadow that physician, and see how he or she uses the system.
6. Think about technical support. Vendors generally service the software, not your network. Who will make sure your exam rooms are wired or that the printers are connected?
7. Be aware of certification issues. Physicians who take Medicare and Medicaid and want to participate in HIT incentives may be restricted to products certified by the CCHIT, or the Certification Commission for Healthcare Information Technology.
8. Consider hiring a consultant or devoting significant staff time to the selection and implementation process. Navigating the waters alone or in addition to your day job can be overwhelming.

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