

Practical Tips from Early Adopters

On investing in the system...

- Define your expectations. Know why you are adopting an EHR and what results you expect to achieve once fully implemented.
 - Ask vendors if they provide reimbursement toward the purchase. Some vendors offer special promotions.
 - Recognize that more appropriate coding and more accurate billing charge captures can result a consistent increase in revenue.
 - Know that BCBSRI has a two-tiered reimbursement system that includes a higher fee schedule for primary-care physicians who implement EHR systems, and that United Healthcare recently released a new “HIT Rewards” program for primary care practice groups.
 - Research the special financial packages offered to physicians adopting EHRs in Rhode Island. Webster Bank, Sovereign Bank, and Washington Trust have programs for physicians interested in EHRs.
 - Talk to other EHR users about ROI. Our research has found that both a return on investment and benefits to patient safety and care can be realized in 1.5 to 3 years.
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On selection...

- Examine your workflow before you buy an EHR. Find a system that will accommodate the structure of your practice.
 - Select a CCHIT certified EHR.
 - Discuss EHRs with other providers in your community or specialty.
 - Review Medical Society websites for helpful information.
 - Research and understand the difference between a hosted ASP model and the Client/Server model to decide which is right for your office.
 - After conducting your initial research and screening of EHR options, select your top three choices and request a product demonstration from the vendors.
 - To most effectively evaluate your options during the demonstration, compile a list of screening questions that pertain to your practice workflow and ask each vendor the same questions.
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On implementation...

- Know that senior management support is critical in your decision to implement.
- Assign a core team that meets regularly to focus on EHR adoption.
- Adapt the EHR into your workflow by analyzing every team member’s responsibility and workflow in advance.
- Envision the patient in the exam room in order to customize the system to your needs.
- Recognize that successful implementation takes personal commitment and time investment.
- Develop policies and procedures for every scenario you can foresee, and know that learning is an ongoing process.
- Create generic templates for 10 to 15 common exams, and create a nomenclature system to organize them.
- Allocate administrative resources to monitor electronic faxes and prescriptions to resolve issues as they arise.
- Plan regular and recurring communication with staff.
- Assign physician champions and coaches to work with the staff during implementation.
- Require each physician to attend formal training on the system.

On the first 6 months of go-live...

- Prepare for a temporary slow-down in productivity by either reducing your patient schedule or extending office hours in order to keep up with the needs of a full caseload.
- Be prepared for frustrations as you learn your new system, but realize that it will ultimately make your practice more efficient.
- Get organized before you implement an EHR. If you are disorganized with paper charts you will be disorganized with an EHR.
- Select a “super-user” group to implement the EHR system first in order to refine the workflow and be a resource to other staff.
- Increase your IT and Training budget –you will always need more than you think.
- Allow for flexibility in physician workflow.
- Maintain a positive atmosphere around the office.
- Take the time to push every button yourself.
- Require each physician to attend formal training on the system.

On achieving maximum benefits...

- Tweak, Test, and Train!
- Know the importance of top-down leadership and recognize that the front line staff will have the keenest operational insights.
- Use multiple training opportunities—from group sessions to e-learning to one-on-one monitoring.
- Assure that providers will have access to all the information they need for quality patient care during the transition.
- Strictly adhere to implementation and training schedules.
- Commit to continued adoption of vendor upgrades, ongoing trainings, and improvements to hardware and software.
- Invest the time and money to research and purchase a certified system and be prepared to invest in upgrades down the road.
- Get all staff and physicians to commit to using the system—you can’t go back to paper.
- Be prepared for an initial slow down—it takes time to set up templates, install interfaces, and adapt to your new paperless environment.
- Create your templates right away for the most common office visits—you can always modify them later. You will see immediate time savings.