



Inefficient EMR Documentation Processes Hinder Successful Implementations

Moving to electronic medical records (EMRs) in medical practices is something that has been sexy for years and is now being encouraged by the government with monetary incentives. There are many noteworthy advantages of moving to an EMR system for data gathering, reporting, and quality management of information to increase quality of care.

With all the obvious advantages we find in using an EMR, there is also a frustrating reality keeping many offices from successful implementation: it is difficult to find an efficient way for providers to document their visits. Most EMRs come from large companies and are not being home grown with a focus on the current practice pattern of the physician. Most providers are concerned with the level of effort needed to complete the documentation for the patient.

Problems occur when providers try to find shortcuts in the system to reduce documentation time and find themselves either cloning prior visits, which may or may not have accurate information for the current visit, or skipping steps altogether. In the more serious situations, EMR clinical documents misrepresent the care provided and the patient's condition. Simply finding ways to shortcut the system is not the right solution. So why is it so hard to do it right the first time?

Microsoft and Apple have created a plug-and-play mentality toward software today. Although many EMRs can be fairly intuitive, efficient documentation processes will almost never be that simple. Spending the time to configure efficient and effective templates and documentation workflows is imperative to a successful implementation that can be sustained and supported by the physician. Time and expertise are needed to create these processes, but they are often the elements that many physicians are unable or unwilling to give.

Creating efficiency for physician documentation is best done by someone who understands the components for proper documentation, the capabilities of the EMR software, and most importantly, the strengths, weaknesses, and preferences of the provider. Forcing a physician to work in the templates and processes "out of the box" will result in many more failures. A strong focus creating efficiency for the physician will result in HUGE payoffs and a successful implementation.

On this topic, here are a few key things to remember for a successful EMR implementation:

- When selecting an EMR, don't get caught up in the bells and whistles. Focus on what the documentation process will be for the provider and clinical staff.
- Make site visits with providers and nursing staff where you can have hands-on experience of the documentation process with the software version you would be purchasing.
 - If your site visit includes a best practice clinic that has spent years creating their own efficient templates, either make sure you have access to those templates or understand the time commitment to develop them yourselves.
- When implementing an EMR, spend the time up front to create efficient processes. Time is money for physicians and there will be resistance to take away time from patients. Use nursing staff or other consultants to create a good process at the start and then make slight modifications as you go forward.

Don't think you have to fit the mold of the EMR vendor. Use templates, dictation, voice recognition, medical assistants, or technology that works for you. There are many different available options to create efficiency. You need to find what will work for your providers.

It won't be easy. Remember that the physicians are the busy revenue-generating source, and they want and need to be efficient. They can also kill an EMR implementation faster than anyone else. Plan ahead, invest in the resources to make the provider experience as efficient as possible, and take the time to identify the processes that will be best for YOU. Doing so will pay off in the long run — both financially and emotionally.

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