

IS YOUR EHR SYSTEM A GOOD FIT FOR YOUR PRACTICE?

EHR systems are not one-size-fits-all. Here are some tips for selecting a system that is right for your retina practice.

BY SCOTT HEINTZEMAN AND DAN MONTZKA, MD

Some early adopters of electronic health records (EHRs)—specialty practices in particular—are experiencing buyer's remorse to the point that they are considering changing vendors. Think about the movements of a patient during an appointment in a retina practice. He or she may be tested or screened in one or more areas of the facility, transitioned to another area to consult with the retina specialist, and then moved to the payment counter. Most all-purpose EHRs cannot accommodate such complicated workflows.

In today's challenging and competitive health care climate, retina specialists need an EHR system specifically designed around their unique workflows and regulatory requirements. Fortunately, a new breed of intelligent technology is emerging that supports online collaboration and addresses workflow challenges with more effective and functional designs.

SELECTING AN EFFECTIVE AND FUNCTIONAL EHR SYSTEM

When evaluating new EHRs, retinal physicians should look for several key features and capabilities to ensure that it can meet their practice's current and future needs.

Clinician-Driven Design

With the right clinical input, software developers can create a system that tailors the content, the flow of the encounter, and the information available on screen for maximum efficiency. Because practicing retina specialists understand the workflow, needs, and documentation requirements of the specialty, clinician-guided software design can be an advantage.

Shared Clinical Knowledge Base

Cloud-based technology enables a clinical knowledge base that can be shared with other clinicians. Such new

technology allows retina specialists to more easily share and analyze relationships among diagnoses, findings, and treatment recommendations on an intelligent platform—enabling them to improve overall patient care, workflow, and charting efficiency.

When the physician is treating an elderly patient with multiple diagnoses, for example, a suitable EHR system can generate the appropriate combination of templates to simplify the charting process. With full interoperability, if a patient is under the care of other health care professionals for his or her conditions, retina specialists can use the platform to efficiently share key patient information (including diagnostic data) with other physicians in their community and across the country to enhance productivity and improve patient care. Retina specialists can securely send and receive patient demographics, medical history, clinical findings, and color images while maintaining HIPAA compliance thanks to the interoperability features of some new EHRs. Clinicians can even share

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AT A GLANCE

- If your current EHR system is falling short of your practice's needs, an upgrade may be worthwhile.
- When evaluating new EHRs, retina practices can look for features and capabilities such as clinician-driven design and a shared clinical knowledge base.
- A modern EHR system should provide attestation for meaningful use requirements and guidance for ICD-10 adoption.

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EHR templates, allowing them to customize their system to meet a specific need or documentation requirement.

Customizable Discussion Items

An intelligent EHR system can gather relevant information at the end of a patient's exam and create customizable discussion items to help easily and efficiently generate letters, make changes, and add personal notes.

Customer Support

Retina practices should look for an EHR system that offers customer support for customization and for navigating compliance requirements. Most EHRs offer some degree of user customization, but, because many clinicians do not have time to fully optimize their EHRs, it is important to have a vendor that will provide a service so that customizations can go beyond merely adjusting user interface mechanisms.

Furthermore, a modern EHR system should provide attestation for meaningful use requirements and guidance for ICD-10 adoption, and vendors should offer ongoing and proactive support in these areas. Many specialty EHR vendors offer education and hands-on support to help small specialty groups meet these regulatory requirements.

OPTIMIZING AN INTELLIGENT EHR

As the evolving medical environment requires ever more documentation and greater transparency, it is becoming increasingly challenging for specialty practices to keep up with these demands. Although upgrading EHR systems is a financial investment, significant technical advances in design, efficiency, ease of use, and interoperability, as well as major improvements in vendor support, can provide a significant return on investment. ■

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