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Implementing Your Electronic Health Record

Background
A decision by a practice to implement an electronic health record (EHR) system can have a significant impact on the quality of patient care, workflow within the office, and the overall improvement in the efficiency of care delivered. For most practices, many questions exist related to the successful implementation of an EHR system. Some of the leading questions include: How well does the EHR system address the practice’s needs? How resistant is the staff to changing workflows and moving into an electronic environment? What are the possible technology limitations of the providers and office staff? What are the perceived benefits to physicians in implementing an EHR system? Practices should identify leading barriers and key questions that need to be addressed in the early stages of planning to adopt an EHR system. Vendors, other providers, and the Internet are a great place to look and find answers to these and other leading EHR implementation questions. The following articles provide useful tips to addressing some of the challenges that a practice may encounter during EHR implementation.

EHR Implementation
BioMed Central published an article in February 2009 titled “How to Successfully Select and Implement Electronic Health Records (EHR) in Small Ambulatory Practice Settings.” The article examines what processes a small physician practice needs to address to support both the technical and personnel-related organizational components in successfully implementing an EHR product. This article provides basic guidance in such factors as technology, training, leadership, the change management process, and the individual character of each ambulatory practice environment. This article is located at: http://www.biomedcentral.com/1472-6947/9/15.

The American Academy of Family Physicians has published an article entitled “How to Successfully Navigate Your EHR Implementation.” The article breaks down the successful implementation of an EHR into three categories: Team, Tactics, and Technology. Team refers to the people and organizational issues that the practice needs to identify and consider; tactics address the specific techniques and choices one needs to make during the design and setup; and technology refers to the software, hardware, and network choices that must be decided for the successful implementation of your EHR system. This article can be found at: http://accustatemr.com/White_Papers/How%20to%20Successfully%20Navigate%20Your%20EMR%20Implementation.pdf.

Stratis Health is a nonprofit organization that focuses on improving health care quality. This organization has developed a user-friendly chart that identifies a number of barriers that a physician practice may encounter in implementing an EHR and a list of solutions that address each issue. The barriers identified include the cost of acquiring an EHR; selecting the right product; changes to the practice’s workflow and process; setting aside time for training and learning to use the product; assessing the return on investment (ROI); getting the physician and administrative leadership to support the change; acceptance on some loss of productivity during implementation; and addressing questions regarding standards and privacy and
security. The information is located at:
http://www.stratishealth.org/documents/HITToolkitclinic/1.Adopt/1.1Assess/1.1Overcoming_Barriers.doc

WordPress.com maintains a Health Care Trackers Blog that provides health care information for health care organizations. WordPress.com published an article entitled “Barriers to Implementing an Electronic Health Record (EHR) System” that details ten barriers to implementing an EHR system and ways to consider in resolving each issue. A sample of the questions addressed include adding paper medical records to an EHR system; the long-term preservation and storage of records; details on the costs to the practice as well as start-up and maintenance; legal barriers; and customizing the system to fit the practice’s needs. This article is located at: http://healthcaretracker.wordpress.com/2009/02/04/barriers-to-implementing-an-electronic-health-record-ehr-system/.