Workflow Analysis

Implementing Electronic Health Records

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Background

Electronic health records (EHRs) can create practice workflow efficiency by enhancing office communication, improving the patient flow within the office, increasing provider-patient interaction, and making patient information available to providers in real time. An EHR can be utilized as a workflow tool giving the practice the ability to collect and present information in one integrated view. Workflow analysis helps provide the physician practice with insights on what to look for in their new EHR product. With respect to the selection and implementation of an EHR, conducting a workflow analysis will help a physician identify the ways to streamline, automate, and improve the efficiency of the practice’s clinical workflow. Additionally, the analysis helps staff build a better understanding of the complexity in completing a task and a better appreciation of how these tasks are accomplished by others. The following articles address the benefits and the resources available for performing such a workflow analysis.

Workflow Analysis References

The California Academy of Family Physicians published an article titled Migrating Workflows from Paper to Your EHR that discusses how physician practices need to put more time and emphasis into documenting the existing paper workflows by the staff. This article states that the lack of planning in integrating high volume workflow activities into the implementation of the EHR can cause problems. One recommendation has the physician identify the 15 highest volume paper workflow activities performed in the practice, and has the staff itemize in sequential order each step along with the staff member who completes a given task in the workflow activity. When staff is in agreement with this workflow analysis, the practice’s EHR implementation team and the EHR vendor staff can meet to determine how these paper workflows are incorporated into the EHR. This article is located at: http://houckhealthcare.com/documents/Migrating%20Workflows%20From%20Paper%20To%20EHR.pdf.

Digitized Medicine published an article titled Why Workflow Analysis, Redesign are Keys to Successful EMR Implementation…and EMR Selection. If performed early enough, the workflow analysis can provide the practice with insights on what to look for in their new EHR product. A completed workflow analysis will: inform the physician practice on detailed descriptions of current office workflow; provide detailed workflow maps of key office processes; identify current inefficiencies, bottlenecks, and opportunities for improvements; provide a high-level outline of desired future workflow redesigns after EHR implementation; and a list of changes that can be made even before an EHR is selected. This article is located at:
Digitized Medicine published another article titled *What Physicians Need to Know About Workflow Analysis Before Selecting and Implementing an Ambulatory EMR*. Workflow analysis can help the physician identify which EHR products are best suited to meet their practice’s expectations. The physician has two options for analyzing workflow. The first is to hire an outside information technology consultant who will perform functions such as interview key physicians and staff, create workflow descriptions and maps, analyze the results, review findings with the practice, and develop recommendations. The second option is for the practice to perform the workflow analysis. Currently, a variety of tools exist on the Internet such as the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality’s (AHRQ) *Health IT Adoption Toolbox*, the Doctor’s Office Quality-Information Technology (DOQ-IT) *Operational Redesign Workbook*, and the Physician Information Technology Office (PITO) *Needs Assessment* which can be used as guides for charting the practice’s workflows. This article is located at: http://www.digitizedmedicine.com/2010/04/what-physicians-need-to-know-about-work-flow-analysis-before-selecting-and-implementing-an-ambulatory-emr.html.

Another source of information is from HealthInsight, which is a private, non-profit community-based organization dedicated to improving health care systems. This organization states that workflow analysis can prepare a provider for changes resulting from EHR implementation. HealthInsight provides a link to a workflow assessment guide and to a software program that will assist the practice in analyzing workflow design. This information was prepared by HealthInsight under a contract with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The information is located at: http://www.healthinsight.org/hcp/doqit/HIT/process/redesign.html.