

What Do
Electronic Health Records
Mean for Our Practice?



What are Electronic Health Records?

Electronic Health Records (EHRs) are computer systems that medical practices use instead of paper charts. All components of clinical practice are integrated into EHRs—from assessing a patient's chief complaint to developing a treatment plan. Everything that used to be handwritten by health care providers and staff is now entered into a computer, directly into the EHRs.

EHRs are not only used to provide medical care, but also can manage all areas of a medical practice's daily operations. These electronic systems include scheduling features, multi-faceted calendars and appointment reminder systems, as well as functions for billing and submitting claims. Many practices already use electronic scheduling and billing systems, but EHRs can combine all of these functions – plus information from the clinical encounter – into one system that is useful for the entire practice staff.

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What are the challenges of paper-based systems?

- > **Paper systems can be inefficient.**
- > **It is easy to misplace or misfile information in paper charts.**
 - Recent Institute of Medicine (IOM) reports indicate how prevalent and dangerous missing and inaccurate information can be. *One in seven hospitalizations is due to missing clinical information.*
- > **Health care providers are expected to remember many complex guidelines, often without any help.**
 - A 2003 study in the New England Journal of Medicine reported that patients receive only 55% of recommended preventive care services.
- > **It is difficult and time-consuming to identify patients with individual characteristics (e.g., people with diabetes or patients on Coumadin) with paper charts.**
 - If a prescription drug is recalled, practices have no efficient way of notifying all their patients who take the drug.
 - Practices have similar difficulties with chronic disease management—to review the progress of patients who have a chronic disease, health care providers must perform extensive chart reviews. For example, before the start of influenza season, practices do not have an easy way to identify those patients who need a flu shot (e.g., patients with asthma).



How will adopting Electronic Health Records benefit our practice?

EHRs can increase the efficiency of your practice and improve quality of care. They can also help maximize reimbursement, and assist in educating and motivating patients. Here's how:

I. EHRs can help your practice become **more efficient** with:

Practice Management

- > Integrated scheduling systems (especially useful for practices with multiple health care providers or multiple locations) link appointments directly to progress notes.
- > The health care provider's documentation of the patient's visit automatically generates a list of codes for billing purposes. EHRs then submit and manage claims electronically.

Chart Management

- > No more time spent looking for charts or missing information.
- > Multiple staff members with appropriate access privileges can view and modify a single patient's chart simultaneously. No one has to wait for a chart to become available.
- > Centralizing all information in the patient's record can reduce redundant testing.

Communication

- > Patients' health information can be accessed from outside the office, which is especially useful in emergencies.
- > Practices can send messages electronically and assign patient-related tasks to other staff members.
- > Staff can submit, track, and receive information from referrals and hospitals.

Adopting EHRs can help practices provide efficient and more thorough care.

Time Consuming Processes Made Easy and Fast

- > Automated formulary checks by insurance coverage can save you time and save your patients' money.
- > Health care providers can order and receive lab tests and diagnostic images electronically. Some EHRs link the lab results directly to patients' records.
- > Required forms (such as School Health forms) can be filled out quickly and easily using templates.
- > Electronic links can be established with public health systems such as the Citywide Immunization Registry and communicable disease databases to help streamline mandated reporting.

II. EHRs can help your practice **improve care** by:

Reducing Medical Errors

- > Electronic prescribing applications alert health care providers if the proposed prescription could trigger an allergic reaction or an adverse drug event.
- > All progress notes are typed or dictated directly into EHRs—illegible handwriting is no longer an issue.

Encouraging Best Practices for Preventive Care and Chronic Disease Management

- > Targeted reminders can be sent for recommended services and follow-up visits.



- > Electronic prompts remind health care providers if a test or procedure is due while the patient is in the office.
- > Electronic tools (e.g., flow sheets and care summaries) make it easy for health care providers and clinical staff to see if patients are up-to-date for recommended preventive services.

Facilitating Population-Level Health Management

- > Critical parts of the patient's record (e.g., chief complaint, medication history, and diagnosis) can be collected in a structured way.
- > Condition-specific queries can be run to ensure that all patients receive recommended services and follow-up care.
- > Electronic registries for disease management help practices stay up-to-date with specific guidelines when treating patients with chronic diseases.

III. EHRs help your practice experience financial gains by:

- > Indicating the services you have provided quickly and efficiently with electronic Super-bill functionalities.
- > Increasing charge capture through better and more complete documentation of the care provided.
- > Using Evaluation and Management (E&M) coders to determine the appropriate level of service for coding.
- > Enabling tracking of pay-for-performance measures.
- > Reducing storage for paper charts, saving space and money.
- > Eliminating transcription costs.

IV. EHRs help involve your patients in their own care by:

- > Allowing you to print relevant patient education materials and self-management tools during the patient encounter.
- > Automatically creating charts and graphs using the vital signs and laboratory results that are entered into EHRs. This allows patients to see how they are doing in managing their health (e.g., growth charts for children, blood pressure or A1C levels).
- > Giving you the option of providing a printable, easy-to-read summary of the clinical encounter for the patient to take home.

How does my practice prepare to switch from paper to electronic health records?

Data Migration

- > Develop a strategy for accessing your patients' historical paper records once you have made the transition to EHRs.
 - Some practices scan portions of their patients' records.
 - Some practices maintain old records as "read-only." These charts are used for reference—all new information goes in the EHRs.
- > Consider preloading vital patient information into EHRs before using the system in daily practice—this allows health care providers an opportunity to learn the system.

Training

- > Ensure all staff members have basic computer skills.
- > Have an EHRs software training plan for current and future staff. Note: Every new hire will need training on EHRs.



Financial Considerations

- > Plan to see fewer patients per session while learning to use EHRs, which may cause decreased revenue during initial implementation.
- > Budget for ongoing system maintenance and support costs in addition to the purchase of EHR software.

Security

- > To protect patients' information, customize the security features of the EHRs, including deciding who has access to which parts of the record and setting rules for password complexity.
- > To ensure the safety of your patients' data, advise all office staff on password safety and other security practices and procedures, installing virus detection software and safeguard all hardware with patient data.



Back-Up Plans and Redundancy

- > Prepare a contingency plan in case the EHRs become unavailable for a period of time due to network stalls or power outages. In many cases, this just means going back to pen and paper until the EHRs become available again.
- > Consider having an extra Internet connection (network redundancy). EHRs can switch to this extra connection if the primary one stops working. Speak with your IT consultant to see if your practice needs this option.



How will Electronic Health Records help me in my daily activities?

Many staff members have multiple functions, so choose a few, or read them all.

1. Health Care Provider (MD/DO/NP/PA)
2. Practice Administrator
3. Nurse
4. Medical Assistant
5. Front Office Staff
6. Back Office and Billing Staff



1. Health Care Provider (MD/DO/NP/PA)

EHRs computerize all of your documentation. You type, dictate or write (using handwriting recognition software on a tablet computer) information into EHRs instead of writing in paper charts. EHRs can reduce the time you spend on non-clinical duties (such as forms) so you can spend more time on patient care.

Patient Care

- > Use tools such as templates and best practice treatment plans, which permit faster documentation of standard visits.
- > Use auto-filled electronic forms to quickly and efficiently complete your patients' school, camp, or work-related health forms.
- > Perform automated formulary checks and insurance eligibility screens to get accurate information on your patients' coverage.
- > Query the EHRs database in order to get information on your patient panel, which can quickly identify individuals in need of intervention.

1. Health Care Provider - continued

- > Print patient education materials in multiple languages without ever leaving the progress note.
- > Search online medical resources. *Many health care providers say electronically researching difficult questions with their patients is a bonding opportunity.*

Prescribing Medications and Ordering Lab Tests

- > Submit prescriptions electronically and the system will alert you if the prescription could trigger an allergic reaction or an adverse drug event.
- > Your patient cannot lose their prescription—it is sent directly to the pharmacy.
- > Quickly and efficiently refill multiple medications.
- > Order diagnostic and laboratory tests directly from the computer.

Remote Access

- > Access patient records securely from outside the office. In case of an emergency, or if a patient contacts you with a question, you can access the record from home and respond to the situation equipped with all of the information you need.

- > Finish working at home without transporting a stack of charts from the office.

Legal and Audit Protection

- > Use EHRs to document all aspects of care. This provides a permanent record of all services rendered, preventive measures encouraged and telephone encounters.
- > Document all recommended services, regardless of patient compliance.



2. Practice Administrator

EHRs can help keep your practice running smoothly. In addition to computerizing your existing processes, EHRs will give you access to the information you need to manage your practice.

Management

- > Improve communication within your office—assign tasks electronically and monitor the time it takes for them to be completed.
- > Track patient waiting times automatically and identify bottlenecks in your practice.
- > Review staff productivity by examining health care provider and staff output.

Privacy and Security

- > Electronically capture privacy notices and consent forms and attach them to the patient record. This reduces storage and ensures that these important forms are easy to review.
- > Automatically store audit trails which only authorized personnel access. These trails record every time a patient file is viewed or altered, the person who performed the action and the computer used to perform the action.
- > Update and maintain the access rules for each staff member. EHRs allow customizable role-based access, which allows you to select parts of the record that each of your staff can use (e.g., clerical staff can see registration and billing data, but not clinical data).

Billing

- > Increase charge capture through better and more complete documentation of the care provided.
- > Quickly run a report on accounts receivable.
- > Provide monthly reports on earnings and reimbursement, and structure these reports to meet your needs (e.g., net earnings per health care provider, net earnings per billable service).
- > Instantly check which claims have been rejected and why; and electronically resubmit them after correcting the problem.
- > Keep track of patient co-pays and other payments.
- > Maintain a record of your patients' insurance coverage history, which can be useful when seeking reimbursement.

3. Nurse

All of your daily documentation will now be computerized. EHRs can reduce the time you spend on non-clinical duties and help improve the delivery of care to patients.

- > Manage patient calls directly from the computer and assign messages to health care providers and other practice staff as needed.
- > Handle prescription refill requests quickly and easily.
- > Act on standing orders so you can practice more independently. (e.g., Your health care providers might institute a standing order to give a podiatry referral to every patient with diabetes. This would authorize you to do so without needing to check with them.)
- > Perform searches on the entire patient panel to instantly find out who needs a medical test in the next month (e.g., mammogram or flu vaccine).
- > Use tools such as templates and best practice treatment plans, which permit faster documentation of standard visits.
- > Use auto-filled electronic forms to quickly and efficiently complete your patients' school, camp, or work-related health forms.
- > Print patient education materials and self-management tools in multiple languages directly from EHRs without leaving the progress note.



4. Medical Assistant

All your daily documentation will now be computerized. The information you used to enter in paper charts by hand can now be entered directly into EHRs.

- > Enter vital signs on the computer. Some EHRs can:
 - Automatically upload data from instruments and machines (e.g., EKGs and blood pressure cuffs).
 - Perform unit conversions (e.g., lbs to kgs).
 - Provide automatic calculations from the vital signs you have entered, such as body mass index from the patient's height and weight.
- > Scan in information that patients provide on forms and worksheets; some systems even recognize the patient's responses and incorporate them into the progress note.
- > Click quickly on common responses when entering patient information.



5. Front Office Staff

All information entered in appointment books or your Practice Management System can now be entered directly into EHRs.

Scheduling

- > Schedule all appointments electronically using the system's calendar by entering all details into the computer, such as the reason for the visit, date, time, length of the visit, and which health care provider the patient is coming to see.
- > Perform a schedule search to get the next available time that meets the patient's needs. This helps with complicated cases (e.g., if the patient can only come in on Wednesdays after 3:00 pm).
- > View the schedules for multiple health care providers and practice locations on the same screen.

Daily Administrative Duties

- > Log calls and messages into EHRs and send electronic alerts directly to the health care provider.
- > Fax forms directly from EHRs.
- > Print forms or labels for many patients at a time.

Patient Check-in

- > Easily manage co-pays and patient payments.
- > If necessary, post a note that is linked to the patient's record (e.g., if a patient is typically late with payments, prefers a certain health care provider, or receives free service).
- > Store patient consent forms in EHRs.
- > Reduce your workload by enabling EHRs to perform automated formulary checks and insurance eligibility screens.
- > Use scan-able forms to speed up the intake process.

6. Back Office and Billing Staff

EHRs can improve the accuracy of billing and reduce claims rejections.

- > Use the health care provider's documentation of the patient visit to generate a list of codes for billing. *(You no longer have to translate handwritten notes into billable services.)*
- > Link diagnostic codes with CPT codes to streamline billing processes.
- > Use E&M coders to advise you on the level of service for coding.
- > Submit, track and manage claims electronically. You will no longer have to spend time handwriting paper claims.
- > Keep track of patient co-pays and other payments, as well as search your entire patient population to identify patients who are delinquent on payments.
- > Maintain a record of your patients' insurance coverage history, which can be useful when seeking reimbursement.
- > Check which claims have been rejected and why, and resubmit them after correcting the problem.



Improve Quality of Care Through Electronic Health Records

For more information, visit www.nyc.gov/pcip



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