

## How to Select an EMR

Whether it's streamlining workflow, saving providers and staff time or improving a practice's bottom line, the benefits of Electronic Medical Record systems have been widely documented and go beyond enhancement of patient care. Physicians have realized that paper charts are mired in inefficiency, and the choice to implement an EMR is no longer a matter of "if," it's a matter of "when." If you've decided now is the time to retire your patient charts, the leap to an Electronic Medical Record system is no small undertaking. As with any major process change or technology purchase, practices need to dedicate time, resources and due diligence to the selection and implementation processes. To help you get started with selecting an EMR, here are some key points to consider:

- Work together to commit to an EMR and stick with the decision. The most successful practices collectively decide to make the switch to an EMR and evaluate and plan as a group. By working together, all members feel empowered and contribute to the project's overall success.
- Define your practice's needs and set a budget. Where is there room for improvement in your current processes? What will you need out of a system and how much can you afford? Keep in mind the financial benefits that an EMR will return when developing a budget. Some practices, such as Nashua Medical Group in Nashua, NH, and Cabarrus Family Medicine in Charlotte, NC, recouped their full EMR investment in just one year.
- Create a list of reputable vendors and request information about the company and its products. Peers, industry associations, trade publications and conferences are a good place to start when pulling together a list. Screen vendors by looking at the following characteristics:
  - Healthcare technology experience—there are many new EMR vendors now in the market, so make sure you find a company with years of development and implementation experience.
  - Financial strength—A profitable company with visible growth and financial staying power is critical.
  - Good reputation and trustworthiness.
  - Strong customer support and service, 24/7/365.
  - A full-solution provider— It's comforting to know an EMR vendor can provide a full-suite of technology solutions for you to choose from, if needed.
- Take a test drive. View demonstrations of the products and ask yourself the following questions:
  - Is the system flexible and easy to use? According to Les Wilson, MD, of Wilson Family Medicine in Tallahassee, FL, "Choosing a product that is easily customizable and user friendly is imperative to success."

- Does the system provide strong, core functionality? Sure, sizzle and spice look nice, but remember the vital features your practice needs foremost before investing in bells and whistles.
  - Will the EMR interface with other technology systems? How well a vendor integrates with and is willing to integrate with other systems is vital.
  - Will patient information be secure? In addition to standard data security, a vendor should provide your practice with disaster recovery service and proactive technical support, such as hardware and system monitoring to minimize downtime and protect patient information.
- After narrowing the field to a few top choices, conduct site visits and call references. Talk to users of the product, ask questions and view first-hand how the EMR works in a similar practice setting.
  - Reach a consensus.

Putting forth due diligence when selecting an Electronic Medical Record system will ensure your practice chooses the right system with a vendor that will provide a successful partnership long-term. And, remember to apply the same dedication and group commitment after selection because according to Louise Collins, RN, BSN, product manager for A<sup>4</sup> Health Systems®, “Success with an EMR is 90 percent attitude and 10 percent aptitude.”