



# TECHNOLOGY

## Medical Information Technology

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### Transforming Our Medical Practice: Why do you need an EHR Transition team?

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With the introduction of Electronic Health Records the U.S. healthcare industry faces its biggest challenge: the transformation from analog to digital information management. As of today 80% of U.S. physicians and 90% of hospitals still use paper-based records. Among small practices, still representing the majority of the primary care delivery system, barely 5% of physicians use computerized health records. But this will rapidly change!

According to Allscripts' CEO, Glen Tullman, the \$27 billion federal stimulus funding will trigger *"the single fastest transformation of any industry in the history of the U.S."* Therefore, many EHR vendors and health insurance companies are speeding up their efforts to install and implement health information technology solutions in physician's offices. With the \$3.09 billion acquisition of Perot Systems, a specialist in hospital health-care information systems, the computer giant Dell has entered the healthcare business, too. The trend is clear: EHRs are here to stay and even the naysayers among us cannot stop the evolution of healthcare delivery. But before you jump on the EHR train you should take one important aspect into consideration: successful change can only happen if everyone embraces and supports it.

EHR implementation failures are often due to poor planning which leads to frustration, work slow-down, confusion and eventually to productivity loss. Before you take the leap of faith you must obtain the support of each and every member of your practice team and convince them that the transformation towards an EHR will improve the quality of care and enhance professional satisfaction. Therefore, I suggest creating an effective EHR transition team comprised of the following:

The "physician champion" who will recruit support from all staff members (physicians, nurses, medical assistants, front desk & medical record clerks etc.) by communicating the goals of the EHR implementation. Concerns about potential job losses must be honestly addressed. I recommend emphasizing that mind-numbing clerical tasks (i.e. record filing) will be transformed for data-mining and chronic disease management purposes. The physician champion must embrace and use new technologies and be able to demonstrate their use to his staff and patients alike.

The "team manager" should have experience in office and project management and possess good communication skills. The team managers

primary responsibility is to keep the transition team on track towards the successful practice transition, communicate with vendors, insurance companies, laboratory providers etc. to ascertain that all issues pertaining to the EHR integration are being identified and addressed.

Each department, or team, within the practice or hospital should identify one individual who can represent their interests and concerns during the transition process. For example, the front-desk team might have concerns regarding the complex data entry and insurance verification process utilizing an EHR that might not perfectly interface with the insurance companies IT system. Any slow down during this process will inevitably decrease productivity.

It is also of crucial importance that the entire team is present during the demonstration of different EHR products, are able to test the various systems components, and can provide real-life scenarios which should be addressed and resolved during the demonstration process. EHR vendors have a notorious reputation to provide dog-and-pony shows, which do not necessarily reflect the reality of a busy practice.

Each team member should also carefully and diligently map out their respective daily workflow and put it onto paper. Why? Because an EHR should digitalize and optimize existing workflow patterns which have proven to be efficient. Such important homework assignment will almost assure a smooth and successful EHR installation and implementation process.

All of you can obtain more information and access technical support by enrolling in the South Florida Regional Extension Center. You can sign-up online at <http://www.southfloridarec.org/>.

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**Disclosure:** The author is a practicing family physician, addiction specialist and computer consultant. In addition, he is a founder and managing partner of a medical IT company and a member of the SFREC Steering Committee.