

Growing Pains of Electronic Health Records and the Impact on Healthcare Offices

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A millennial healthcare experience

A 25-year-old man goes in to see his doctor. He has a series of questions about symptoms he has and a few ideas of what could be wrong based on online research.

The doctor examines him, and she quickly rules out a couple of the man's suggestions but finds one is a real possibility. She decides to order some blood work to confirm, submitting the order on her tablet. Then, she adds a few notes to the patient's electronic chart.

The next day, the patient receives a text message notifying him that his test results are now available in his patient portal. He quickly logs in and reviews the info. It includes a message from his doctor, outlining a brief plan of action and direct contact number for any questions.

Sound familiar to you?

This is the landscape that every healthcare office either has entered or will enter in the near future.

How is this a different patient experience?

Not only is technology now being utilized to diagnose and treat patients, but it's also being used to effectively communicate with patients and to store information. This transition is unsurprising because patients are increasingly expecting to access any and all of their information and there is now an emphasis placed on clear communication as a top priority for patients.

The Pros

Let's start with the pros.

- Patient data in one, easily accessible place
- Allows patients to be informed and actively engaged in their treatment plan
- Patient data better integrated into daily care, from genetic data to behavioral information, to clinical records
- Better chronic disease management
- Ability to collect, analyze and store data
- More time dedicated to providing care and less time documenting it

The Cons

The overall perception of Electronic Healthcare Records (EHR) by physicians isn't entirely positive. Part of this is because healthcare professionals aren't the true targets of EHRs. **The design of EHR's has been customized primarily for the patient's experience.** This has created frustration among physicians because they've been pushed to adapt to a process that wasn't built for them.

As published in a report by the **Agency for Healthcare and Quality**, the main problems that are occurring include:

- High capital cost and insufficient return on investment for small practices and safety net providers.
- Underestimation of the organizational capabilities and change management required.
- Failure to redesign clinical process and workflow to incorporate the technology systems.
- Concern that systems will become obsolete.
- Lack of skilled resources for implementation and support.
- Concern that current market systems are potentially not meeting the needs of rural health centers or federally qualified health centers (FQHC).
- Concern regarding the negative unintended consequences of technology.

Why not just use paper?

You may think that if EHRs (Electronic Health Records) are this problematic, then they probably shouldn't be used. However, according to a study published by the National Center for Biotechnology Information, the pros outweigh the cons. They report a [51% chance that an EMR can improve office practices](#), while there is only a 19% chance of negative impact.

While there are adjustments that need to be made in how EHRs function, the use of electronic records isn't going anywhere. Plus, they've opened the door for many informational technology systems to be put in place.

So, if you haven't started shifting your practice and office space to accommodate information technology, you need to start now!

How are EHRs changing healthcare office staff priorities?

The impact of EHRs on office workflow starts simply by rethinking the job descriptions of each employee in an office. The goal should be to create the smoothest flow of information possible. In order to pursue these ends, staff should be cross-trained and led to work as a team, going above and beyond traditional expectations.

Offices that fail to adjust the patient and information flow are those that'll encounter problems in this changing landscape.

What're the needs of healthcare office spaces moving forward?

As information technology is implemented, not only is the need for back room, file storage eliminated, but the need for oversized waiting rooms can also be reduced. Waiting rooms may now include a kiosk for patients to enter their information; this addition will give real-time data before the patient has even entered the exam room.

Additionally, the need for separate physician offices is also diminishing. Physicians no longer need to consult in a separate office because a lot of their work is done during the exams. Partners may also transition to shared office spaces, which could reduce the overall size of the office.

The goal is to reduce the bloat of the traditional medical office and to streamline the design, services, and overall patient flow and experience.