

EMR Selection Guide



EMR SELECTION GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION

Today's world is heavily based on technology and the healthcare industry is no exception. With Meaningful Use winding down and making way for the Quality Payment Program (QPP), now more than ever it's important for practices to have the right tools for success; of chief importance among those tools is a quality EMR. Choosing and implementing the best EMR for your practice puts you in position to not only be a successful QPP participant, but also to focus on providing quality care, getting you back to the business of healing.

This eBook will offer information critical to the EMR selection process, guiding you from planning, to purchasing. We'll examine the importance of knowing what your practice needs and then researching vendors to see who fits the bill in order to narrow down your field. We'll then review best practices for comparing systems in order to decide which vendor to pursue a contract with and how to complete the purchasing process. Finally, we'll look at common mistakes that practices make through this process and how to avoid them.



STEP ONE: MAKE A PLAN

If you're looking to select and implement an EMR, one of two things is true: you've never had an EMR before but you feel that now is the right time to adopt this technology, or you have an EMR but it isn't living up to expectations and you're considering a replacement. There are plenty of practices in both camps, with many practices having never purchased an EMR and evidence showing that around a third of the practices that have an EMR are likely to replace those current systems for a variety of reasons. Whatever your reason for embarking on an EMR selection journey, it's important to make sure your practice is ready and to explore your practice's needs.



THE PLAN: KNOW YOUR NEEDS

The first question you need to ask yourself is, what is my practice trying to achieve with an EMR? Start by exploring your practice's goals. Dig deep to identify goals in each department, considering both the clinical and administrative sides. Decide which goals are most important; these will be your key goals that you'll want to keep in the front of your mind as you explore EMRs. Think about the functionality you'll need in a software to reach these goals and experience the benefits you're anticipating.

What is my practice trying to achieve with an EMR?



EMRs are powerful tools which can help a practice achieve a number of objectives including increasing patient satisfaction, improving the health of a population, reducing costs, and even increasing physician and staff satisfaction. Additionally, a strong focus in healthcare today is the need for an EMR in order to successfully participate in the Quality Payment Program (QPP). Whatever the specific goals of your practice may be, explicitly identifying them as you start the EMR selection process will provide you with a set of clear objectives to measure each vendor against in order to find the one that will best fit your needs.

The next question to ask as you lay out your plan is, what must this system do?

To answer this question it's important to examine your practice's workflow and determine what features you'll need in your EMR in order to maintain efficiency. Some sample items to consider are what interfaces you'll need, if you plan to use dictation, and if you'll need a patient portal. Make note of any features that would be deal breakers if they didn't exist. This is the list of items which must be fulfilled in order for you to continue to consider a product.



Once you've determined your must haves, start to think about what you'd like to have.

These are items that you could live without, but if they're included with a system that checks off all your must have boxes, that system becomes more attractive. Think about what you do, how you do it, and how you could do it even better. Don't be afraid to list features you think are far-fetched; you never know when a software vendor will surprise you.

Once you've identified your needs, set your project timeline.

Decide on a target date for go-live, considering the time it will take to select a system as well as complete the implementation process. Be realistic about what you think you can accomplish in light of your practice's normal workload. Consider any other projects on the practice's radar and whether those items can be put on hold as EMR selection and implementation requires a great deal of focus and dedication. Know that the amount of time that passes between deciding to adopt an EMR and implementing your system will depend a great deal on the time you have to dedicate to the project in the beginning, with your vendor's workload and schedule playing a role toward the end of the project.



Finally, you need to define your budget.

Think about what you'll be spending up-front and what you can afford in continuing costs. Remember that the cost of an EMR includes a number of components, including software, hardware, training, data backup, support, and IT management. Leave nothing out when deciding what you can afford and be realistic.



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THE PLAN: PREPARE YOUR PEOPLE

Once you know what you're looking for, your timetable, and your budget, it's important to get your staff on board. Realistically, the best software in the world isn't going to improve anything if it isn't used properly, and proper software use starts with a commitment to learn the system and make it work for you. Determine if your staff, and most importantly your physicians, are ready to implement an EMR. Frankly, if your physicians aren't committed to this project, it'll be very difficult if not impossible to see success. The need for physician commitment doesn't mean that every doctor in your practice has to be gung ho, but it does mean they should all agree that implementing an EMR is important and be willing to make the time investment necessary to see success.

Along with general staff support, you'll want to identify project leaders.

This will involve a couple of individuals in your practice, at least one each from the administrative and clinical sides, with the clinical leader ideally being a physician. Having a clinical leader is imperative. This person should be able to describe the vision for why your practice is undertaking this project to the rest of your clinical staff, define your office's workflow and how it will translate into an EMR, and handle objections and challenges that arise during the process.



In addition to a clinical lead, you'll want to have a project lead who will handle the overall implementation.



This person will be responsible for bringing all of the components of EMR implementation together smoothly, from working with the vendor and IT personnel to scheduling installations to facilitating staff training. While this project lead is meant to oversee and coordinate the many moving parts involved in EMR selection and implementation, they shouldn't be afraid to delegate responsibilities to a selection committee.

Next you'll want to identify members of your staff who will to become super users for your new EMR.

These super users will be your "EMR Gurus," able to help other users learn and become more proficient in the software after your vendor's training has been completed. To fulfill this role, these individuals have to be dedicated to learning all the ins and outs of your new EMR and be willing to share their knowledge as needed.

Finally, determine who will support your network and hardware. Typically, EMR vendors limit their support to the software itself. This means you'll need to have your own IT personnel, either internal or through a separate vendor, who will help with the installation of hardware and its support and maintenance.

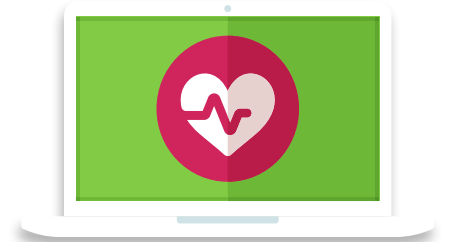
Who will be the clinical leader?



THE PLAN: TACKLE TECHNOLOGY

The final piece of the planning puzzle is to think in more detail about the technology that surrounds your EMR, including other software used in your practice, the hardware you'll need to run your new EMR, and the type of hosting that best fits your practice's needs.

The Hardware



One of the first items you'll need to consider is if you want to keep your current practice management system (PM).

Obviously, as your current PM is already in use, keeping it would mean one less piece of software to implement and be trained on, however you need to be sure your new EMR will successfully interface with your existing PM so that patient information can be sent directly between the two systems, eliminating the need for double entry work. If you decide to replace your current PM, one option is to choose an integrated system which combines a practice management and EMR on the same database, ensuring that all information will be exchanged across the clinical and administrative systems without the need for additional interfaces. But, if you can't live without your existing PM, consider keeping it with an interface to your new EMR. Check with your PM vendor for compatibility and pricing.

The next item to consider is what type of hardware you plan to use and the configuration that works best for your office.

Will you want stationary computers in each exam room or would you prefer a wireless set-up with each physician carrying a mobile PC? There are pros and cons to both options. In the stationary option, one potential drawback is that more computers will be needed as you'll need one for each exam room as well as others for places such as the hallway for clinical staff to use. One benefit, though, is that in a fixed model desktop PCs, which are less expensive, are typically used, easing the pressure on your budget. Also, this model alleviates the burden on clinical staff to carry mobile PCs as they move from room to room. Or consider stationary computers on a rolling cart system, if you don't want to equip every exam room with a PC.

The wireless set-up – if each of your providers will carry some type of mobile PC, whether a laptop or tablet, as they move through their day.

These computers will be connected to your main server through a wireless network. The benefit of this option is that it's easier to arrange as you don't need to reconfigure the physical set up of your exam rooms to install the computers. The potential drawback, however, is the possible expense of supplying mobile PCs for each of your staff members. Whatever configuration you choose, you'll need to decide on the specific hardware that you intend to utilize, deciding between tablets, laptops, or desktops, each with their own pros and cons.



The Hosting

Once you've decided on your hardware, you'll want to think about hosting.

The two options available are client server and cloud hosting. To make this decision, you should first think about how you want your patient information to be stored. If you utilize a client server configuration, all patient information will be stored locally in a server located within your practice. This means that you'll be responsible for the maintenance, security, and backup of the computer system that hosts all of this sensitive information. If you choose this setup, you'll purchase your EMR through a licensing agreement and then store the software on your in-house server, the maintenance of which is your responsibility moving forward.

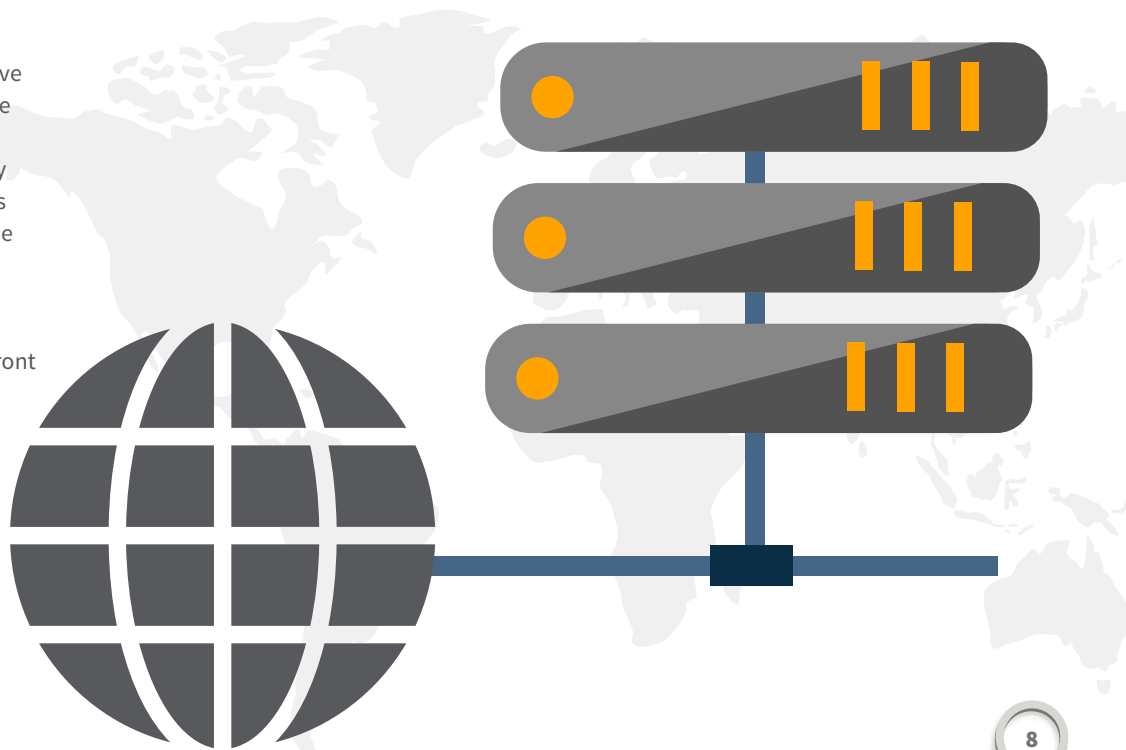
If any of the maintenance and security responsibilities related to local hosting seem intimidating, a better option may be cloud hosting. In this setup, you'll have your network of computers in your office for your staff to use, but that network will connect to a server that is hosted by your vendor through the internet. In this case, your vendor's IT staff maintains the server, performs software updates on a set schedule, and regularly backs up all data, taking this burden from you. Also, this option is likely to have a lower up-front cost, with an ongoing monthly fee for each provider.

Next, you'll want to consider what interfaces you'll need and if you want to connect any devices to your EMR.

In order to achieve the full benefits of an EMR, it should be able to interface with the third parties your practice works with most, including labs, health information exchanges, and immunization databases. Make sure to compile a complete list of the interfaces you need before you begin talking to vendors; typically each interface carries a cost so this may affect your final price quote. In addition, think about the diagnostic devices you use in your office and whether each EMR you're considering will connect to them. Such connectivity is a great time-saver as your staff won't have to go to another room to start a device or manually enter the data gathered by these devices.

Finally, think about any other add-ons you need.

Do you need voice recognition software, a patient portal, ePrescribing of controlled substances, or population health tools? Determine in advance what you'd like to implement and make sure the vendors you move forward with offer these services.



STEP TWO: THE SEARCH BEGINS

Once you've established exactly what you're looking for, it's time to venture out and see which vendors fit your specifications. Just as there are a number of vendors out there to explore, each vendor will likely have a wealth of information available to you. Look at a variety of resources - websites, videos, brochures, and initiate initial vendor conversations - to gain a clear picture of each vendor's features and benefits. It's also wise to take advantage of word of mouth. Reach out to other practices that have implemented an EMR to learn about their experiences and get vendor referrals. When contacting vendors, conduct phone interviews to learn about what they can offer. Be sure to ask about ease of use, ability to interface with other softwares and devices, HIPAA compliance, security features, product certification, and vendor receptivity to user ideas. If you plan to participate in a program like QPP, a good place to start is [ONC's website](#) to choose potential vendors from their list of certified products.



Once you've gathered all your information, narrow your list to the top three to five vendors by comparing their capabilities to the criteria you deem most important. There are a number of factors on which you could base your decision-making process. Let's explore a few of them in detail.

Choose Your Criteria



PM + EMR

Integrated PM & EMR:

The benefits to this are a reduction in the number of interfaces needed and easier support, with the drawbacks being that they're often more expensive and require a more involved and lengthy implementation, which means a greater disruption for your practice. This factor is most important to consider if you're not satisfied with your current practice management system and intend to replace it as well.



2015
CEHRT

Certification:

2015 Edition CEHRT is most current, and being certified means the EMR software offers functionally to help providers meet the ever-evolving clinical practice improvement and care coordination activities that are required for successful participation in CMS payment and incentive programs including the Medicare Quality Payment Program (QPP) and the Medicaid EHR Incentive Program. Allowing you to have an independent verification of the vendor's claims.



Ease of use:

Select vendors that have functionality and content that will complement the way your practice works, your specialty, the number of providers you have, and what regulatory or payment program requirements you're looking to fulfill. Small family practices have different needs from those of large hospitals. Make sure the vendor you choose understands your specialty and practice size and knows how to implement their software in a way that makes sense for those variables.

To Put It Simply ...

As you're deciding which vendors will make it onto your short list it's important to ask the right questions:

- What is your onboarding process? Will I have dedicated resources?
- How do you support your product? Is support US-based?
- Are upgrades extra?
- How, when, and at what cost may I obtain billing and/or patient data if I terminate service?
- Can the EMR integrate with my existing PM (if maintaining your existing PM)?
- Can I import data from another system?

Once you've completed your research and are comfortable with your short list, it's time to schedule product demonstrations, making sure all stakeholders are available to join the demos, and request quotes from each vendor to review and compare.



Automation tools:

Integrated services such as appointment reminders and statement or collections outsourcing can provide a great deal of value for a practice by increasing efficiency and freeing up internal resources for other tasks. If these items are important to you, make sure the vendors you're considering offer them. Likewise, consider any clinical efficiency tools you'd like to use to boost patient engagement and safety, population management, and clinical decision support and make sure the vendors who move on in your process offer these services as well.



Interoperability with labs, devices, and registries:

Manual data entry is an efficiency killer; choosing an EMR that interfaces with the third parties your practice deals with will ease that pain and increase your return on investment by freeing your staff up to focus on other critical initiatives.



HIPAA compliance:

Any software you choose should include features which will allow you to maintain HIPAA compliance and confidently answer "Yes" to HIPAA security audit items. If a vendor can't ensure this, it is best to move on to the next vendor.

STEP THREE: COMPARE AND MAKE YOUR CHOICE

Once you have your short list, it's time to see how the vendors stack up against each other to determine which is your best possible fit. The first step in this process is to schedule demonstrations. This will allow you to see each of the products in action. It's wise to create a list of questions to ask to use in demonstrations in order to make sure you get to see the exact functions that are most important to your practice. When determining your questions, consider your practice's workflow and include a scoring system in order to weight responses and see how each vendor performs. You'll want to allow approximately two to three hours for each vendor demonstration and make sure that both decision makers and users are present.



Ask vendors for case studies and references you can contact about their experience.

If possible, schedule an in-person visit to see the software in action in a practice similar to yours. This will give you a better understanding of how the system actually works in the real world.

The next step is to review price quotes.

Get a formal proposal from each vendor including the pricing and a clear description of what's included. Remember to be realistic about pricing, as it will vary from vendor to vendor based on a variety of factors. When reviewing quotes, focus specifically on understanding the total cost of ownership and return on investment (ROI) for each product. While one vendor may have a high upfront cost focused on training hours for mastering the software, another vendor may tack on charges over time in recurring fees or add-ons, making the total cost of ownership higher in the end.

Put together a spreadsheet to compare pricing, being sure to include all costs from each vendor to get the full picture. Don't be seduced by a small price tag; in most cases you really do get what you pay for.

When going through your deliberation, be honest with your salesperson.

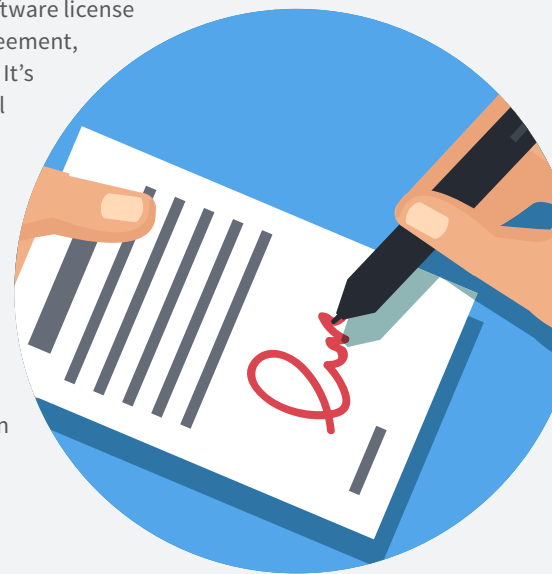
Tell them what you love about their product and also what you don't. Tell them what you love about the competitor's products and give them a chance to show similar features. Make sure to keep them updated if your implementation timetable changes or if you're heavily leaning to another vendor and why. Communication is key to finding your best fit and getting the highest value.

When you've decided on the vendor that's right for you, ask them for their best and final offer and make sure to include all the pieces and parts in your contract negotiations.

You want to be sure the price you settle on is the all-inclusive cost of the system. Also, make sure to take advantage of any offers the vendor has available. If there's a discount offered on an add-on product or a percentage off the implementation price if you sign your contract before the end of the month, let that work to your benefit.

Finally, you'll be required to sign a contract or purchase agreement.

This will include your software license agreement, support agreement, and various other items. It's important to ink the deal and return the required on-boarding paperwork or payments, including EULA, BAA, and other necessary information, as quickly as possible because this will help you get added to the vendor's implementation queue in time to meet your target go-live date.





SOME WORDS OF CAUTION



Now that we understand the process of selecting an EMR, let's explore a few of the common mistakes practices can make during this process so that you can work to prevent them before they occur.



It may be cliché, but if you fail to plan you may as well plan to fail. This is the first mistake many practices make. Selecting and implementing an EMR is a major project that requires lots of careful thought and analysis. Surprises are unavoidable, but careful planning can help mitigate them. Don't start this process blind; take the time to plan your course before you start the journey.



Similarly, lack of physician leadership is another huge mistake practices make in this process. Physicians are impacted by an EMR more than any other group of people in your practice. You need a physician leader to be involved in order to keep the project going and make sure the system meets your clinical needs.

Another big mistake practices make is failing to get staff buy-in. Adopting and utilizing an EMR will only work if everyone is on board. Frankly, if you don't have staff support, table it until you do.



The next mistake that's often made is poor allocation of time. This project is a huge undertaking; you need to specifically allocate time for EMR selection and implementation. If you're concerned that your staff doesn't have the time to commit to this project but you still want to select and implement an EMR, it may be wise to hire a consultant to take care of some of the leg work for you.



The final mistake practices make is choosing the least cost option just because it's cheapest. Frankly, cheaper isn't always better. Consider what you're getting for the money to determine the true value of each system.

CONCLUSION



Perhaps the most important tool a medical practice can obtain is a top-notch EMR to help them provide quality patient care while successfully participating in regulatory programs such as **Quality Payment Program**.

The right EMR will make sense for your specialty and practice size, enhance and streamline your workflows, and offer you some integrated add-ons that will allow you to worry less about your bottom line and get back to the business of healing.

Offered through both client server and cloud hosting, MicroMD's 2015 Edition CEHRT EMR improves clinical productivity while enhancing patient care, all while delivering the flexibility necessary to work with a variety of specialties and practice sizes and the capabilities needed to successfully participate in the Quality Payment Program. This easy to use EMR also offers the benefits of an integrated practice management system and a variety of add-on eSERVICES to increase front office and clinical efficiencies, adding up to one healthy practice. For more information, visit micromd.com/emr or call 1-800-624-8832.

About Henry Schein MicroMD

Henry Schein MicroMD, a subsidiary of Henry Schein, Inc., provides simple yet powerful EMR and Practice Management solutions that facilitate the delivery of superior patient care, automate incentive and quality reporting activities, and streamline operations for today's busy providers. Full-featured, time-tested, and budget-friendly, MicroMD EMR is 2015 Edition CEHRT certified software that helps small practices, large medical groups, community health centers, and billing services accelerate progress toward a paperless environment and health information exchange with minimal disruption and stress.

Learn more at www.micromd.com.