EHRs & Patient Satisfaction: the Missing Link

Patient dissatisfaction has been linked to EHR inefficiencies. Find out how to pick the right EHR to boost patient satisfaction.
As technology has swept through the medical industry, much has changed in the way doctors and patients interact. Patients today have great expectations their healthcare providers’ use of technology. For their part, medical professionals must grapple with ever-changing government rules and regulations that determine how and where they can use technology. These expectations and challenges intersect at the crucial juncture of EHR technology.

Electronic Health Records technology is the nexus of all the changes happening in the medical industry. For doctors, transitioning from paper-based processes to software has been a challenging journey. Throw in the rapid churn rate in the actual technology, policies being passed and consumer expectations – and doctors face a very difficult situation.

For patients, the promises of EHR technology have not been fully realized. In some cases, technology is actually making their healthcare experiences more complicated, frustrating and dissatisfying. So where is the middle ground in all this? It all lies in picking the right EHR for your practice and specific needs. Not all EHRs are created equal. If you want technology to translate into more satisfied patients, you need to undertake a serious examination of your current EHR. This guide aims to give you the right tools and information to do just this.
Key Areas to Consider When Picking an EHR
Usability refers to the ease with which anyone with minimum training in a system or platform can use it and complete tasks without hitting any major roadblocks that they cannot easily solve. When it comes to EHRs, usability is the most important “feature” to look for as it determines how effectively you can improve the quality of service you offer.

- EHR Systems with low usability ratings force doctors and their staff to waste much time trying to figure out how to complete simple tasks.
- Features used every day are not easy to locate or the interface is overly complex, stifling workflow.
- Interface is not intuitive, meaning it takes a lot of thinking to figure out how to complete a task or where to locate information.
- Is poorly designed and has an unfriendly interface that lacks elegance and simplicity.

- High-usability-rating EHR systems are designed to ensure doctors and their staff complete tasks as quickly as possible.
- Simple and intuitive user interface has everything the user needs just where they need it to be.
- Features are limited to what is needed at that moment. Additional features are cleverly hidden from sight.
- Is designed with the doctor in mind and how they and their staff will use it. The system is user-based, not technology-based.
ACCESSIBILITY

Accessibility refers to how easy it is for the doctor and staff to input, find and process information when necessary, and in the correct format. Because of the large amount of information that is collected and processed in a medical practice, accessibility can drastically reduce time spent processing information and increase time spent with patients.

**NO**

- Low accessibility means it takes time and effort to input, find or process information, reducing gains over paper-based processes.
- Poorly organized or complex systems prevent the doctor from getting the information they need quickly.
- Accessing information is a headache with software or equipment breakdowns or “freezes” when most needed.
- Lack of cloud-based infrastructure means you can only access the EHR system when at work.

**YES**

- Cloud-based EHR systems are fast and information is accessible anywhere there’s an Internet connection.
- Intuitively designed libraries make it easy to record, extract or process information.
- Filters and rules engines parse information into manageable pieces that you can easily access and utilize.
- Software updates are done automatically, reducing downtime during which information is usually inaccessible.
Practice workflow is at the heart of any attempts to increase efficiency, reduce waste and serve patients better. When bottlenecks appear, they choke workflow and introduce obstacles towards better service. Technology, and EHRs specifically, can introduce bottlenecks if not well-suited or designed for the practice.

**NO**

- Your current EHR lengthens the workflow process instead of reducing it.
- Workflow steps are not smooth and do not help you transition from one task to the next seamlessly. Instead, you have to figure out how to move from one step to the next.
- Does not fit into your current workflow, instead disrupts it, forcing you to adapt to a new workflow.
- Efficiencies gained through automation are lost through complexity of systems and poor workflow integration.

**YES**

- Shortens your current workflow resulting in efficiency gains that trickle down to patients.
- Well-thought-out process transition ensures you and your staff move from one task to the next smoothly.
- Does not disrupt your current workflow, instead, augments and speeds it up for faster turnaround times.
- Simple rules-based approach helps you and your staff intuitively move from step to step in your workflow.
It’s no secret that even the best software systems will fail if not properly utilized. This is one of the biggest challenges practices are facing today: training and compliance (or user acceptance). Practice staff rarely use all the features EHRs have for a variety of reasons. This translates into poor outcomes for both practice staff and their patients.

**NO**

- Training your staff to use your current EHR system is taking forever, and even when you think you’ve got it, they still won’t fully utilize it.
- Staff complain the EHR is too complex to master, opting instead to stick to older methods.
- Training your staff proves too expensive because the learning curve is steep.
- For various reasons, your staff finds it hard to fully adopt the system to fully replace the old way of doing things.

**YES**

- Training staff to use the EHR is straightforward and quick. Simple and intuitive UI/UX make this possible.
- Over time and with use, staff can adopt the system as it is easy to self-teach and master.
- EHR vendor offers extensive user support and training to help you achieve full user compliance.
- Practice staff finds the system a delight to use and are incentivized to use the system without continual reminders to do so.
INTEGRATION

When systems are disparate, data and other resources must be shared between them. When this happens, delays and downtime increases. For a medical practice, this is not acceptable. Conversely, when using an integrated system, your staff and patients are able to enjoy all the benefits and efficiencies that accrue from using a single platform.

- You have sourced different parts of your system from different vendors. This multiples the number of people involved if anything goes wrong.
- The user experiences across your different systems are not consistent, creating confusion and significant bottlenecks.
- Patients using your system may be confused by the different user interfaces, e.g., your scheduling and billing systems.
- Poor integration means poor outcomes overall.

- Fully integrated systems work seamlessly, making it easy for your staff to transition between functionalities.
- Single-sourced, integrated EHR systems are easier to manage, saving you time that can be spent on patients.
- User experience is consistent across different functions of the EHR, resulting in better efficiency outcomes.
- In case of a breakdown, there's only one number to call, and there are no blame games that ensue.
MOBILE ACCESS

We live in a mobile world these days. For medical practices hiring mobile-savvy staff to serve mobile-savvy patients, EHR mobile access is critical in serving your patients quickly and efficiently.

**NO**

- EHR offers no mobile access to either staff or patients.
- Non-cloud-based EHR system is not accessible over the Internet, hence cannot be viewed via mobile web.
- Multi-device support is not well developed, meaning staff and patients have to use a desktop or laptop to access or use the EHR system. Other devices are not supported.
- No mobile optimization, so anyone accessing the EHR system via mobile has to load the entire system on their mobile device.

**YES**

- Mobile access is available to staff and patients so it's easy for them to use the EHR system at any time.
- Cloud technologies provide round-the-clock access to EHR systems, especially from mobile devices.
- Multi-device support ensures the EHR system is enabled and supported across devices for easy access from smartphones and tablets.
- The EHR system is mobile optimized and can recognize mobile device access (responsiveness), serving up an optimized version of the system.
EHR technology is only in its infancy and transforming rapidly. Patients want the future, and they want it now.

**NO**
- EHR uses server-based, not cloud-based, technology that has proven to be problematic in terms of up-time, updates and service level ratings.
- Your current EHR has very long developmental cycles, with updates being pushed out once a year or less frequently.
- As new EHR technology is developed, your current EHR is still based on older standards.
- Your EHR vendor isn’t updating their system fast enough, meaning you miss out on newer technologies.

**YES**
- Based on cloud technologies that offer massive advantages in terms of updates, up-time and cost savings.
- Short developmental cycles using agile methods results in weekly updates.
- Updates are pushed through the cloud, so your EHR system is updated frequently and automatically.
- Newer technology results in better outcomes as you are able to harness the latest technology to serve your patients better.
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