

Chapter 7

Online EMR Systems

What internet based EMR systems are all about

Almost all vendors can install their software in the computers in your office or clinic. If you prefer, some of them can host your database in their computers. You access your charts and records over the internet. This is called an Application Service Provider (ASP).

Advantages of accessing EMR over the internet

- It costs less up front. You don't have to buy software. EMR online is a usually a monthly service that you can finance out of an operating budget. Most vendors offer predictable, consistent, monthly subscription fees that you can match to your cash flow.
- It uses less expensive computers.

Since on-line EMR runs on a powerful host machine, the computers in your office function as terminals. They display screens and allow the operator to key in data. The only requirement is that your computers have access to broadband internet. Look for a vendor with technology experts who will support your system and give you help when you need it.

- You can access data from anywhere

You should be able to log onto the vendor's online network with an internet connection and a PC, palm-held computer, or a smart-phone .

- It's easier to install and maintain

Your vendor maintains and administers the software and provides backups, updates, security and troubleshooting. You install and maintain workstations and printers in your office or clinic. And you provide a broadband internet connection.

- Updates are automatic.

With a conventional software system, your vendor will likely send you periodic program updates that you pay for and that your office staff installs. Look for a vendor that will provide and install updates for the life of your agreement at no extra cost.

Security issues with online EMR

To protect the privacy of data in transit, a dependable vendor should encrypt and authenticate internet connections using secured protocols. They should also place firewalls at your computers and their host computers. If your office burns or somebody steals your computers, your data are safe.

The difference between “thin clients” and “fat clients”

Some systems are stuck with “fat” clients that require a lot of data. If your vendor offers a “thin” client, you will be able to run a web-based system with minimum data. To communicate through a thin client you’ll need to install Windows Terminal Server or Citrix Winframe software.

Accessing online EMR with handheld devices

An online EMR system is not just about making money; it gives you a more quality life by giving you freedom that’s impossible with paper charts and ledger books. You can use a palm computer or a smart-phone to check clinical or financial data from an automobile, airplane, or car. You have instant, portable access to office schedules, patient charts and can send prescriptions, from any location.

Using online EMR to communicate with other Electronic medical records systems

Look for a vendor with a system that will interface with any medical records or practice management system that uses the industry standard HL7 records format. If you run into a vendor peddling a system that doesn’t meet that standard, continue to kick more tires.