

Chapter 9

Technical stuff

The need to be compatible with Microsoft

Most EMR are compatible with Microsoft. A few may not be. You should check to make sure. Your software should be compatible with new Microsoft systems and applications as they appear on the market. You should always be using the latest technologies. If you get the smallest hint that a potential vendor is not keeping current, keep looking.

Microsoft designed a high performance database specifically for applications like EMR. The replication of data by a powerful relational database like SQL will let you accurately disseminate data throughout your office or clinic. This means that multiple doctors, nurses, and lab technicians can check a chart and input data to keep it current.

SQL protects your charts and files against network failure by storing them in a central location. It secures them by hiding and encrypting the data. The SQL database runs on standard computer hardware.

Software that operates from Microsoft's Windows server gives you high-performance file and print service at the same time. It helps their hardware engineers ensure that your system is easy to use, reliable, and secure. It also means that you add to it as your office or clinic grows.

How to know if your computers can run EMR software

If your computers can run Microsoft Windows, they can run on most systems. A flexible system should work with Windows XP or Vista. You'll need a low end dual core processor with at least one gig of RAM. You don't have to race out and buy new and more expensive computers. Unless your system is five years or older, it will probably do the job.

About being a "Microsoft certified solution provider"?

Being certified by Microsoft means that the technicians tending to your system meet Microsoft's standards. They know what they're doing. They stay on top of evolving Microsoft technology. If you want to know more about what it means to be a certified solution provider, you can check it out <http://www.microsoft.com/mcsp>.

Why Microsoft technology

You'll need support to maintain your computers with parts and technicians. That means computers that are compatible with Microsoft. Nobody went wrong recommending IBM

in the 1980s because it was then dominant throughout the industry. Linux is not so widespread and not every technician knows Linux.

How computers are linked in a physician's office

Your software vendor will likely use Microsoft Windows to link your computers. Linking your computers allows you to deliver both EMR and other Windows applications throughout your office or clinic and to connect with remote servers. This in effect gives you a mainframe computer with terminals, a big savings over a web of computers working separately.

Whatever Windows software you are using now should continue to work after you install EMR. If a potential EMR vendor tells you there will be problems, then you should think about continuing to the next company on your list.

What happens in the event of a technical glitch

A good EMR vendor will offer technical support for all their software, products and services. You should be able to call their technical support people any time during weekday working hours for technical support. Additionally, they should give you an email help desk 24 hours a day.

When you call, most vendors will ask you to be at your computer with your system running. Your vendor's technician will want to know the sequence that led to the problem. When did it start? How long have you had it? How often does it happen? Can you remember anything that might have started or caused it? You might have a power outage. You might have added new software or hardware. You might have changed your administration or configuration.

How EMR records are transferred from one system to another

Make sure your system is compatible with the format called HL7, which stands for Health Level Seven—the industry standard for transferring data between healthcare systems. If your patient moves or needs to shift to another specialist, you can use the HL7 format or PDF to transfer his or her records to another EMR system.

Remember the lingo. HL7. Any EMR system that you might choose has to be compatible with HL7. If it isn't, you'll find that your office or clinic is isolated from the larger medical community.

How EMR should help you make money

Good EMR software should be easy to use and flexible with a smooth interface, comprehensive help files and automatic double-checking of the accuracy of data entered. Your staff should be able to search charts, clinical records, examination and surgery schedules, details of insurance coverage, and referrals. You should be able to find a patient in seconds, not minutes. Any physician, surgeon, nurse, or technician who

needs to see a chart should be able to call it up instantly. You should be able to generate thousands of statements in minutes, not hours.

A dependable, comprehensive EMR system should forever end the sight of someone scurrying down a hall bearing a folder stuffed full of papers and illegible scribbling.

How to convert from one EMR system to another

Quality EMR vendors have technicians who know how to convert data from one system to another. Look for an experienced vendor. Since hundreds of physicians have switched from one system to another, the chances are that they have already converted systems with no loss of productivity during installation. To tell you more, they'll need to know about your current system.

EMR charts and SOAP notes

You read left to right, so chart and soap categories are ordinarily arranged at the top of the screen of your monitor. You also read top to bottom, so issues and chores are usually arranged on the left side of your screen.

Under Subjective, you've got your patient's complaints. Then you've got the history of whatever is wrong with him or her—where does it hurt, how badly does it hurt, for how long, and so on. Then you do a review of systems—cardiovascular, respiratory, gastrointestinal or whatever is germane. This is followed by your patient's medical history: childhood illness, family problems, occupational hazards, surgeries, medications, allergies, pregnancies and the rest of it.