

Dermatology Coding Alert

You Be the Coder: Switching to EHR? Weigh These Pros and Cons

Question: With new technology emerging all the time, the move to electronic health records (EHR) is on. But is EHR right for your practice? What are the potential pit falls?

Answer: The pros: EHR can make your billing life easier. Experts say that in the long run, EHR can help you become more efficient and more accurate, and may even help improve your return on claims. EHR, also known as "e-records," can also speed up patient care and reduce expenses for paying transcribers and reduce compliance risks due to illegible documentation.

The cons: Many EHR systems allow "canned" documentation that a provider cuts and pastes from a previous visit or a template, according to a study of about 30 products by consultants **Patti Trites** and **Reed Geltzer** with Advocates for Documentation Integrity and Compliance in Augusta, Mich.

Another problem is that most EHR systems fail to provide a good audit trail. Many systems don't show who made a change to a record or when they made it. On paper, it's easy to tell if someone scribbled on a chart or used liquid paper to erase something.

Legal concerns: The real problem with many EHR products is that they wouldn't stand up to the civil rules of evidence in court, Trites says. "These records aren't going to hold up in a civil proceeding," because you can't tell who altered them and on what date, she says.

Best bet: Have someone who's familiar with the principles of health information management (HIM) help you select a system, Trites says. She offers these three bits of advice:

1. Make sure that your system has an audit trail and that you can access it without being a programming whiz.
2. Make sure your system doesn't delete audit information at the end of each day.
3. Ask whether your system will meet the standards of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).