

Health Information Compliance Alert

EHR Trends: Small Practice Set-Up: Look to Cloud-Based Tech If You Want to Get Ahead

Cost, ease-of-use, and dependability top the reasons for implementing cloud-based EHRs.

The old saying goes, "it's ok to have your head in the clouds, but keep your feet on the ground." As for health IT, the cloud is the thing that will firmly keep your practice running smoothly and your feet on the ground.

Client-Server EHRs Can Be Hard for Small Providers to Use

EHR technologies that follow traditional, client-server styles might still be popular with large-scale healthcare organizations like hospitals and clinics that have unlimited financial resources, but small practices and solo providers often have trouble maintaining the expensive hardware and software set-ups □ which can run upwards of \$40,000. If you add in annual upgrades and training, the cost and training are too much for most small groups to bear. That is why cloud-based EHRs continue to rise in the health IT ratings game.

"Our advice is to go with a cloud-based EHR system," says **Richard Loomis, MD**, chief medical officer and vice president of Practice Fusion. "Higher overall satisfaction, better usability, easier implementation, and lower costs are all driving practices to adopt cloud-based EHR systems, making it one of the biggest trends in health IT."

MACRA context. With new value-based initiatives dominating healthcare, the importance of a reliable, efficient, and user-friendly EHR is not only essential to running your practice, it is a matter of critical, fiscal importance. As the need to be more focused on patient care rises combined with the mandates to report your health IT measures under both Meaningful Use (MU) and/or MACRA's Advancing Care Information (ACI), you will need an EHR that is less cumbersome in order to devote more time to providing quality care.

Consider this: For example, if you bill Medicare more than \$30,000 a year and administer care to over 100 Medicare beneficiaries annually, you are expected to move into the Quality Payment Program (QPP). And, under the Merit-based Incentive Payment System (MIPS) tech component, ACI, you'll be graded on reporting at least five of the eleven measures over a 90-day period for the CY 2017 to avoid a negative pay cut. You might also want to consider that ACI caps at 100 percentage points and is weighted at 25 percent of your overall MIPS score □ which is a hefty portion of the composite.

Cloud-Based EHRs Make It Easier to Be Ahead of the Health IT Curve

If you plan on practicing value-based medicine in the years ahead, you'll have to become savvy in regard to health IT. Don't take for granted that the EHR plan you are using now will be the best one for you in the future.

Top priority. Cloud-based EHRs have a reputation for efficiency and ease-of-use with user-friendly tools and an interface that mobile-friendly providers understand. "A core component of provider satisfaction is EHR usability, which is becoming a critical success factor as the burden of quality reporting continues to grow in an increasingly fee-for-value world," Loomis says. "Practices already spend \$40,000 per doctor per year □ \$15.4 billion nationwide □ on collecting and reporting information about the quality of their care to Medicare, Medicaid, private payers and others."

He adds, "These costs will increase in 2017 and have a disproportionate affect on small practices. This year we may even start to see that it's becoming financially unfeasible to practice medicine without a user-friendly EHR."

Reference guide. If you are looking into an upgrade or feel dissatisfied with what you're running now, check out these four advantages to moving to a cloud-based system:

- **Easy access.** The cloud can be accessed by providers and staff anywhere, anytime. This type of EHR makes short work of data input and actually helps with the coordination of care.
- **Safe, secure, and private.** The cloud protects and stores patient and practice data securely and safely. The human and physical accidents that cause client-server EHRs to shut down are non-existent with cloud technology.
- **Cost efficient.** "With a cloud-based EHR system, all data is kept in a secure cloud environment," Loomis says. "This reduces costs by eliminating the need to maintain private servers and backup systems, install application updates, and significantly reduces the need for IT support."
- **Growth options.** Staff come and go. Mandates change. The nice thing about a cloud-based EHR is that it is easy to add users and expand the program.

Tip: If the technologies you introduce to your practice are too complicated for your staff to use, then you've probably invested in the wrong software programs. Put on your consumer hat, do your research, and find an EHR system that is user-friendly, affordable, and focused on what you practice. Many healthcare companies offer excellent customer care to clients that purchase their comprehensive software and services.

The ONC also offers a handy tool and grading system to compare certified EHRs. You can visit the ONC CEHRT search engine here: <https://chpl.healthit.gov/#/search>.

Resource: To find out more about Practice Fusion, visit <http://www.practicefusion.com>.