

## Health Information Compliance Alert

### Reader Question: Consider a Cloud-Based EHR in 2018

Remember to research vendors to find the best-fit for your practice size and needs.

**Question:** We're considering upgrading to cloud technologies for our EHR in 2018 and would like to know the pros and cons of that option compared to our current client-server system.

Codify Subscriber

**Answer:** With a client server, your practice hosts the storage hardware, such as a computer or hard drive, which is physically located on site in your office. This system requires equipment and personnel, such as a dedicated IT staffer to ensure server reliability, smooth upgrades, network security, and a myriad of other concerns related to the upkeep of that particular EHR regime.

However on the flip side, if you invest in cloud-based technologies, the vendor provides software and file storage from a server that exists offsite. You and your team access patients' medical records through a secure connection, maintained by your cloud provider.

Take a look at the advantages of cloud-based EHR storage:

- **Implement with ease:** If you choose a cloud-based EHR, you don't need to have an "IT guy" on site. Your patients' electronic protected health information (ePHI) is stored and secured offsite under the care the vendor's IT staff.
- **Cut costs:** A move to the cloud not only moves your practice IT forward with more mobility options, but it saves money, too. Worries about hardware fixes and upgrades will now be your vendor's problem.
- **Improve productivity:** Your software provider's IT team performs updates and maintenance overnight to protect workflow so that clinicians never miss a beat.
- **Work from anywhere:** If your clinicians work at multiple locations, the cloud makes EHRs available anytime, anywhere, and from any device as long as there's a secure internet connection.
- **Reduce breach risks:** While some providers may fret about how safe ePHI is in the cloud, it's likely more secure than many client-server environments. That's because data breaches that plague healthcare providers are often the result of lost or stolen hardware, and the cloud limits these causes for breaches.
- **Outsource systems' backup and contingency planning:** If your EHR is on a client server, it's your problem. If you're on the cloud, it's your vendor's problem.

**Remember:** "Not all cloud vendors are alike. It is more nuanced than that," says **Kurt J. Long**, founder and CEO of FairWarning, Inc in Clearwater, Florida. "Look for third-party evidence when choosing a cloud vendor for your EHR - a good-looking website does not equate to a mature product or adequate security."