



Choosing the EMR system that's right for you

Published: April 29th, 2005

By: John Deutsch

Healthcare, along with construction, education and retail are ranked as being the slowest adopters of IT. With more pressure than ever from government, insurers and patients, why is healthcare still so far behind?

There are currently over 200 PM/EMR software vendors working for your business, making the search for the right software a difficult task. Because of the technical nature of the product it is difficult for the average consumer to understand the inner workings of software and its potential pitfalls. The software business is really very different from other types of businesses, in which a company may spend 2-5 years developing a product with all expenses and no revenue. Once the product is done it can easily become a free for all of how many sales can we make this year. As a result software companies rely heavily on a strong sales team with big commissions to sell their product. This is bad news for the consumer as what you see is not always what you get.

Practice management/documentation software generally has 3 price levels. The first level is your boxed systems for small 1-2 provider offices. These are usually older products with a large client base that will provide you with the basics. These types of products generally run below \$3000. The second level is your more customized systems for Small to Medium sized offices. These products will often require on-site installation and training because they need to be customized for each application. Prices for these product usually run between \$5,000 to \$35,000 depending on the number of providers. For example, a small 1-2 provider office can expect to pay between \$5,000 to \$15,000. While a larger office of 5-10 providers can expect to pay around \$3,000 per additional provider, bringing the total cost to around \$25,000 to \$35,000. Keep in mind however that with most systems hardware, installation and training are not included.

Not all software is created equal. Products that may look similar at first glance can be entirely different. Judging a software's ease of use, customization flexibility and the vendors willingness to make customizations for you require you to look at the software and its company in more detail.

First things first. Before you contact any software vendors you will want to decide what you hope to accomplish with the implementation of this software in your office. What problems is your office plagued with? Are you looking to improve organization, eliminate paperwork, increase efficiency, reduce staffing, improve you billing, deliver a higher quality of service to your patient's or simply just have an electronic way to do billing. By accomplishing these goals what can you save? Now set your budget.

Once you have a plan in place start looking around to see what is out there. Ask your colleagues what they are using and if they are happy with it. Do your research, most companies have fairly informative websites and some even have online demonstrations.

Be realistic when purchasing anything high tech for your office. This stuff may be easy to use by the doctor or computer whiz who made it but extremely difficult for the average user. Doctor Smith's way of running his office and documenting his patients' visits may not be the same way you do these things.



Get the right people involved to help make this happen. As you put a higher emphasis on technology you are increasing your dependency on this technology. No patient wants to see you crawling under a desk while on the phone with Dell's Tech Support. You only need to know how to use this new software not fix its problems; put someone else in charge of this job and make sure they will be available incase something goes wrong.

Staff can often be huge hurdles in the implementation of new technologies, as they realize pretty quick that technology is there to replace them or inconvenience them. Your offices' inefficiencies, often is what gives them a paycheck at the end of the week. It's expected for staff to have a certain level of resistance towards the adoption of new technologies in your office. Get them excited about the new technology and let them know how this is going to provide them with new opportunities in your office.

One thing remains a constant, and that is that there is no shortage of software that has been abandoned because 1) It did not live up to what it said it would do 2) It was too difficult to use 3) It simply was not convenient enough 4) The support was so bad that simple problems turned into big problems real fast.

John Deutsch is the founder of [EMR Experts www.emrexperts.com](http://www.emrexperts.com), a medical software consulting firm specializing in EMR software solutions, located in San Diego, CA. He can be reached at john@emrexperts.com