

EMR Return on Investment:

Improving Efficiency and Quality with an Electronic Medical Record

A brief white paper that explains how an electronic medical record (EMR) system can help physician practices operate with greater administrative and clinical efficiency and support high-quality care for all patients.

Introduction

This white paper explores how an EMR system provides two important benefits for physician practices of all sizes: improved administrative efficiency and support for high-quality patient care. How an EMR system delivers these benefits will impact its return on investment (ROI) calculations, and so it will be critical to any practice's due diligence prior to a purchase decision.

Improving Administrative Efficiency

Managing paper medical records is a time-consuming, labor-intensive task. To ensure effective medical record management requires a great deal of clerical and administrative effort. Yet if physician practices are going to begin the transition to an EMR, it must be clear how an EMR frees the practice from these tasks.

In general, the administrative benefits of an EMR are directly related to the practice's commitment to conversion. If the end result is a full transition that makes paper records obsolete (which means existing paper records are rarely accessed) a practice can expect its staff to operate more efficiently, with less effort. If the transition is incomplete (which means paper records are still accessed regularly) the benefits become less significant.

Assuming a complete conversion, here are the benefits practices can expect from an EMR, starting with the impact on charting.

- **Fewer chart pulls.** With an EMR, every networked workstation in the practice becomes the chart rack. The rack — and all its records — are accessible to any authorized user, from any workstation. New data goes into the chart electronically, without a staff person having to find a physical file, pull it, and re-file it after the patient encounter.

- **Fewer lost charts.** Every time a paper chart gets pulled, there is the chance it will be misplaced or filed incorrectly. This is a common source of frustration, even in the most efficient paper-based practices. Because an EMR has no physical files, the files can't get lost. Plus, EMR users do not have the ability to change where individual patient files are stored on the server, so they can't be lost electronically.

- **Less time spent filing.** An EMR can automatically incorporate data into a patient's chart from outside the local network, without staff members manually entering it. By creating interfaces to external sources — such as laboratories and hospitals — an EMR keeps patient records current without the time-consuming filing that a paper-based system requires. At one Practice Partner® site, a full-time staff person had to file 600 to 700 reports from local hospitals every week prior to implementing an EMR. After installing a medical records interface between the practice and the hospital — which allows direct downloading — filing time was reduced to less than 10 minutes per week.

- **Universal chart access.** Paper charts can only be in one place at one time. But every record in an EMR is available from any workstation, whether the workstation is in the office, at a local hospital, or at a physician's home. Multiple people can view the same patient's chart simultaneously, so the daily work of the practice — whether it's a physician updating a progress note or the front desk updating an immunization record — does not have to slow down because someone else has the chart.

- **Easier compliance with chart requests.** Fulfilling chart requests is another time-consuming administrative task. To accommodate each request, a staff member must pull the chart, disassemble it, copy its contents, reassemble it and re-file it. An EMR allows practices to fulfill every request with one simple step: printing the chart from any connected workstation. In the same way, an EMR enables practices to comply with chart auditors by simply giving the auditor access to a workstation. Typically, practices with an EMR system in place pass chart audits easily because the EMR provides better documentation and more consistent organization of charts than a paper-based system.

Of course, chart management is only one part of office life in a physician practice. Communicating with patients and with each other is another area where adding an EMR can make a genuine difference in a practice's efficiency.

- **Improved external communication.** With instant access to the chart from any workstation, administrative staff can handle a wider range of incoming calls, reducing the need to take a message, find the chart and return the call.

- **Improved intra-office communication.** When an EMR offers integrated e-mail capabilities, it can greatly enhance the speed and quality of office communication among staff and physicians. Instead of using handwritten notes, anyone can send or receive e-mail from any workstation.

With some systems, records of important e-mail exchanges (delivery or receipt) can also be documented automatically in a patient's chart.

- **Fewer call-backs from pharmacies.** If the EMR incorporates a prescription writer function (as Practice Partner® Patient Records does), it ensures the legibility of every prescription. Additional options include a built-in checking mechanism for drug-to-drug interactions that runs prior to prescription writing and direct delivery of prescriptions to pharmacies via fax server technology. All of these can dramatically reduce the need to spend time answering call-backs from pharmacies.

Supporting High-Quality Patient Care

When a practice's administrative staff can significantly improve efficiency, this helps physicians operate more efficiently as well. Specifically, providers can see more patients within normal office hours and improve the overall quality of documentation — which has a direct bearing on the quality of care each patient receives.

- **Higher quality documentation.** Adopting an EMR in your practice helps standardize chart quality and minimize problems that can occur as a result of illegible handwriting, inconsistencies in documentation and other common human errors. Practice Partner Patient Records, for example, uses a progress note-centric design that helps ensure the entire chart — including problem and medication lists, health maintenance and allergies sections, and all of the primary components of the chart — is automatically updated when a physician creates the progress note. This not only allows physicians to spend more time with patients and less time on paperwork. It also results in a complete chart whether physicians create a progress note via direct entry, transcription, or voice recognition.

- **More efficient chart signing.** Paper-based medical records require physicians to have physical access to

a chart in order to sign it. An EMR changes this dynamic. Its universal electronic access enables physicians to sign all unsigned components — including progress notes or lab results — electronically from any workstation, whether in the office or at a physician's home. That means physicians can review charts quickly and efficiently, at a time and location that is most convenient for them. Some EMR systems also provide administrators with reports on all unsigned notes, which is an excellent way to improve quality across the practice.

Many EMR systems also give clinicians tools that directly affect the quality of patient care and customer service. None of these is available with paper-based systems.

• **Built-in protocols and reminders.** Unlike a conventional medical record, an EMR can provide clinicians with important patient information at the time of documentation. For example, diagnosis-specific templates can help remind physicians about special protocols and tests related to the patient's condition. An EMR can also incorporate age-, sex- and disease-specific health maintenance reminders that pop up each time a patient chart is accessed. The reminder feature also makes it easy for practices to proactively improve routine health maintenance metrics by querying the EMR database for all patients with overdue items and then sending reminder letters.

• **Improved medication management.** Effectively managing patient medications can improve many patients' quality of care. With the prescription-writing functionality of Practice Partner Patient Records, for example, every time a prescription is written, the EMR system automatically initiates drug-to-drug and drug-to-allergy interaction checks, medication list updates, and automatic documentation of the prescription in the progress note and checks of selected drugs against the patient's formulary. All of these checks reduce the risk of improper prescriptions and related issues that can compromise

quality of care. Many EMR systems also provide query features that can be very helpful for practice-wide medication management. For example, in the event of a drug recall, the practice can quickly determine which patients are taking the medication and proceed with notification.

Although the most important aspects of care occur during patients' interactions with clinicians, there is another component of the total experience that can be improved with the adoption of an EMR: customer service.

• **Patient communication.** Just as an EMR minimizes the need for administrative staff to put patients on hold or perform call-backs (by providing chart access from any workstation), it offers the same opportunity to clinicians, increasing the efficiency with which patient calls can be handled. Instant chart access is also essential for establishing and ensuring high-quality telephone-based triage.

• **Patient education and involvement.** Many practices that implement an EMR find that it also serves as a helpful tool for engaging patients more actively in their own care. For example, patients participating in programs to reduce weight loss, blood pressure or cholesterol respond well to graphical representations of progress, which are easy to create using an EMR because the data is already entered in the system. EMR systems also make it easy to print appropriate patient education materials directly at the point of care. Alternatively, you can deliver these files electronically — which gives patients access to an even wider range of materials than the practice could afford to print.

Critical Questions to Ask

Although EMR systems provide some universal ways to improve practice efficiency and support high-quality patient care, not all EMR offerings are the same. As you consider various systems, make sure to find out which capabilities each system offers, and

whether these features are standard or optional. Questions you may want to ask include:

- Does the EMR provide access to all patient charts from any connected workstation?
- Do connected workstations include those located at other facilities or physician homes?
- Can the same chart be accessed from multiple workstations simultaneously?
- Will changes made to a chart at one workstation be reflected at other workstations?
- Does the EMR support direct interfaces with other facilities, such as hospitals and labs?
- Does the EMR include an e-mail component?
- Does the EMR include a prescription-writing component?
- Can the EMR update multiple parts of the chart based on a new progress note?
- Does the EMR include automated health maintenance reminders?
- Is it easy to query the EMR database for multiple variables?
- Does the EMR provide access to patient education materials?
- How many practices is the EMR installed in today?
- Is the EMR installed in a variety of different-sized practices?

To Learn More

To find out how an EMR system can help your practice improve efficiency and support high-quality care, contact Total Doctor Solutions today at:

1-877-387-6525

For more information about the award-winning Practice Partner EMR/PM solution, visit:

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About the Product

Practice Partner Electronic Medical Record and Practice Management Solution

McKesson's Practice Partner is an award-winning suite of integrated applications designed to manage all of the mission-critical functions of a modern physician office. Total Practice Partner includes Patient Records, one of the nation's leading electronic medical record systems, Appointment Scheduler, a sophisticated multi-clinic scheduler, and Medical Billing, a complete practice management system. Over 2,000 practices nationwide utilize Practice Partner EMR/PM software to improve productivity and enhance quality care.

About the Company

McKesson Corporation

Practice Partner is a part of McKesson Corporation, currently ranked 18th on the FORTUNE 500. McKesson is the oldest and largest healthcare services and information technology company in North America and works with physicians and providers across the United States in practices ranging in size from one to more than 400 physicians.