MEDICAL MANAGER

Quick Facts About EMR

- EMR stands for Electronic Medical Records

- EHR (Electronic Health Records) and EMR and often used interchangeably

- Fewer than 10% of American hospitals and around 16% of individual physicians' offices have implemented an EMR system.

- The healthcare industry only spends 2% of revenues on information technology, as opposed to 10% in other information based industries

- The specialty with the highest percentage of EMR use is general surgery, and the lowest is psychiatry.
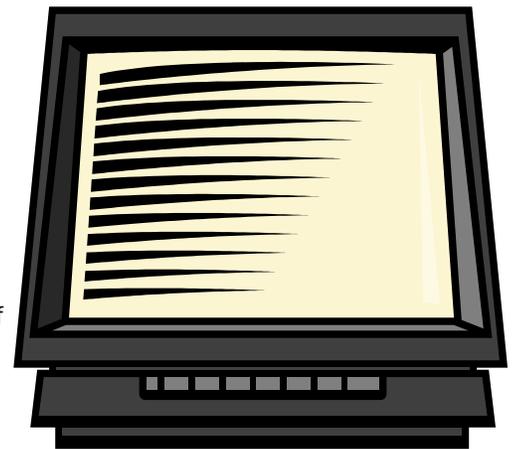
ARE YOU READY?

It is hard to believe that we are already in April and that this whirlwind year is nearing its halfway point. There have been many exciting and interesting changes in the healthcare industry this year that will have major implications for how doctors and hospitals function into the future. One of the most dramatic changes came courtesy of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (AARA) of 2009, which, in attempt to address rising healthcare costs and the growing number of uninsured Americans, includes several new laws concerning the medical field. The one that will affect most physicians and hospitals is the required widespread adoption of Electronic Medical Records (EMR) systems.

In this issue of "Medical Manager" we will focus on EMR—what it is, how it works, and how you can successfully implement its use into your practice. We will examine how the AARA outlines the requirements and address the many privacy issues surrounding the use of electronic records. We will also hear from a doctor who has successfully implemented EMR into his practice.

It is understandable for physicians who have practiced with paper records for many years to be apprehensive about the change and to be concerned about possible drawbacks. At MD Alliance Billing, LLC we feel that EMR will help doctors offices and hospitals become more efficient, more cost effective, and better able to serve their patients. We are here to help you in implementing an EMR system—choosing the software, setting it up, training your staff, and getting you on your way toward compliance with the new laws and a more prosperous and effective practice. We hope you find the articles in this newsletter informative and interesting, and please do not hesitate to contact us if we can help you.

Cloe Sill
President

ARRA 2009

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 has the express goal of the "utilization of a certified electronic health record for each person in the United States by 2014." To accomplish this, the already existing Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology has been allocated funds for grants and loans to provide incentives for hospitals and individual doctors who adopt EMR systems. Beginning in 2015, doctors and hospitals who do not use EMR in an effective way will be penalized. Two federal advisory committees have also been established, one for policy and one for standards, to help implement a nationwide electronic medical records system and to ensure patient privacy.

WHAT IS EMR?

Electronic Medical Records (EMR) are medical records in a digital format, sometimes referred to as EHR (Electronic Health Records). All patient information, including demographics, medical history, allergies, test results, billing record, prescribed medications and more, are usually available over a network and accessed by a portable lap-top type device. The need to find and pull patient charts is eliminated. Computer physician order entry (CPOE), an element of EMR, allows doctors to communicate orders for patients electronically to hospitals, pharmacies, and other entities involved in the patient's care. Additionally, doctors can log into some systems from offsite to check on patient progress.

There are several different software companies that provide EMR software systems. EMR is often part of practice management software systems which are designed to help you with the day to day operations of a medical practice, including appointment scheduling, capturing patient demographic information, maintenance of insurance information, processing claims and sending statements, and generating reports. At MD Alliance Billing, LLC, we can implement and operate a practice management system for your office that will include the effective use of EMR. Contact us today to get started.

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WHY USE EMR?

- Reduce costs—it is estimated that if all medical transactions were handled electronically, the US could save $11 billion a year
- Improve quality of care—provide fast access to current information, avoid duplications or unnecessary or dangerous interactions, provides health care workers with decision support
- Promote evidence based medicine—provides access to unprecedented data for medical research to increase knowledge of effective practices and treatments
- Decrease claim processing time and increase revenue—studies show revenue is increased at least 3-5% and lag time for claim return reduced an average of 7 days
- Protect the environment—reduce paper use and provides a more organized office

"Reduce costs, improve quality of care, promote evidence based medicine, decrease claim processing time and increase revenue, and protect the environment."

A DOCTOR'S PERSPECTIVE

So how do doctors really feel about using EMR? We spoke to a doctor who implemented an EMR system into his practice 3 years ago to find out how he and his staff have enjoyed using it.

Why do you use EMR and what do you see as its advantages and disadvantages?
We use EMR to fully integrate our office—scheduling, billing, charting, etc. The main advantages are the overhead cost savings, improved documentation and ease of billing. There have been a few issues with hardware failure and problems entering changes and updates. I would also like the software to be web-based.

How has your staff responded to EMR?
The staff really likes it, especially since it is so easily customized to the individual patient.

What would you say to a doctor considering implementing an EMR system for the first time?
The process of implementation was easy, and it really is an absolute must for your practice.

"The process of implementation was easy, and it really is an absolute must for your practice."

ISSUES WITH EMR

- Privacy—We will discuss this in more detail at the bottom the page, but suffice it to say, EMR poses some serious privacy issues that need to be addressed.

- Older Records—The scanning of older paper records is a time-consuming, expensive process and may exist in all forms, both legible and illegible, that may pose difficulties in creating comprehensive records.

- Training—Resistant doctors and office staff are a challenge, and often more resources are spent on the purchase and installation of the system than on the education of the staff on why and how to effectively use it.

- Technology limitations—limitations in servers, software, and hardware will pose greater challenges as the technology tries to keep up with increased use as more hospital and doctors implement EMR.

- Other issue such as record preservation, providing patients with copies, digital signatures, and other legal issues will also need to be addressed if EMR is to be successfully implemented nationwide.

"These issues will need to be addressed if EMR is to be successfully implemented nationwide."

HOW HITECH CAN HELP

The Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health (HITECH) Act is the portion of the AARA that outlines the legal requirements for the nationwide implementation of an electronic health information infrastructure. $36 billion dollars has been allocated for this process. What it means to you as a medical professional is the required implementation of an electronic medical records system by the year 2015, after which practices will be penalized for non-compliance in the form of reduced Medicare reimbursements . Assistance is provided by the HI-TECH Act. Loans and grants will be available to hospitals and individual practices, particularly in smaller and rural areas, to help cover the costs of implementation. In addition, incentives in the form of premiums paid on Medicare and Medicare costs will be given to those who are using EMR in a meaningful way.

"What it means to you as a medical professional is the required implementation of an electronic medical records system by the year 2015."

EMR AND PRIVACY ISSUES

Privacy is a major issue in the use of EMR and the one that has probably delayed it's widespread implementation the most. Sensitive data being posted online or over a network drastically increases the number of people that have access to it. Any system will of course have to adhere to HIPAA privacy guidelines, but the unique issues with the internet pose new challenges not yet addressed by the current laws. Additionally, EMR provides unprecedented amounts of valuable information for advertisers and pharmaceutical companies, and the sale of medical records to these companies is on the rise. Processes for clearly informing patients of their privacy rights and obtaining consent for any use of records will be critical parts of this nationwide transition. We need to look to other countries, like Canada and parts of Europe, where these issues have already been successfully addressed.

Medical Manager Minute

Thinking about implementing EMR in your medical practice? Want to read up on current research and opinions on the subject? A quick Internet search using your favorite search engine can provide lots of interesting articles and reviews of different EMR systems and their implementation and use. An informed decision is the best decision, so we encourage you to contact our office with any questions your research might uncover. Compliance is required by law, but we are here to make sure you have the right information to make the best decision.

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EMR SUMMARY

- EMR stands for Electronic Medical Records and is often used interchangeably with EHR, or Electronic Health Record.

- An EMR includes all patient data in a digital format available over a network and is often part of a comprehensive practice management software system.

- The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 requires that all doctors and hospitals implement EMR by the year 2015.

- There are many advantages to using EMR including reduced costs, improved quality of care, detailed research evidence, decreased claim processing time, and increased overall revenue.

- There are some issues with EMR that need to be addressed including privacy, the incorporation of older records, staff resistance and training, and technological limitations.

- The Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health Act (HITECH) provides funding and support for doctors who adopt an EMR system in the next few years.

- At MD Alliance Billing, LLC, we can help you with every step of the process—discussing advantages of EMR, selecting an EMR software system, and assisting you in implementing that system in your practice. Additionally, we can ease the burden on your staff by interfacing with your EMR to schedule appointments, process claims, and manage your cash flow. Call us today!