Choosing the Right Technology Match for Your Medical Practice

By Derrick Berger [2]

Why finding the perfect EHR or practice management system for your medical practice is like “The Dating Game.”

When you are going to spend a lot of time with someone, you want to make sure they have the same goals and values as you, will grow with you, and will be pleasant to spend time with in good times or bad. I’m referring of course to your electronic health record (EHR) or practice management system.

Our search started over five years ago for our current system, when we launched our practice. I have an IT background so I knew somewhat what it was I looking for from a technology point of view. Since we were starting the practice from the ground-up, and moving to a new area to start the practice, we didn’t know anyone to ask — either professionally or nearby. So I really didn’t know where to start or what I was looking for.

I first used Google and Yahoo to narrow down the searches. I know that sounds naïve but I based it on rankings on these search engines. My method: I assumed if they had a sponsored link or were in the top five to 10 results, they were valid.

Narrowing down
I used the Google and Yahoo results to build my short-list and settled on 10 vendors, and then looked for reviews of any type for each. This required me to search even further in the search results to see if anything would come up (good or bad).

I also used KLAS Research to make sure the vendors on the short-list were at least on their list of reviewed vendors. Capsite Research was somewhat helpful here too but I felt like KLAS had more relevant information in their reviews.

Next, I made a long list of questions that I would ask any vendor when purchasing software. These were mostly technology questions and some functional questions, which were difficult for me, since I didn’t have any clinical or work flow experience.

Examples of some functional questions:
1. Can you batch patient statements to send them at once?
2. Is there a claims scrubber to pre-process claims before they are sent to clearinghouse?

Examples of technical questions are more like:
1. Is the PM/EHR a cloud-based or client-server based?
2. Are the PM and EHR single-sign-on (do they have separate logins or same login)?
3. What type of redundancy do you have a server level, data-center level, etc?
4. Who audits your security?

Showtime. I called the various vendors and spoke with the sales staff. Some took the time to respond to my questions and others wouldn’t answer until I saw their demo. This was another way for me to narrow down the list since this felt too much like a pressure tactic. I removed them from the list.

The Shorter List (or Short List of the Short List)
Now I had narrowed down the list to about three to four vendors. The next step is to ask the vendors for a reference, but I’m not a huge fan of this step. Typically the reference is someone who is very happy with the vendor.

Final Selection
I used the demo as the biggest single factor in selection. My reasoning here is because I wanted to make sure our choice was easy to use. Due to my lack of clinical workflow experience, I had to make sure it was easily adaptable and flexible to different workflows. In other words, I wanted something that wouldn’t require a lot of training but could grow with us if our needs change. It was mostly “fear of unknown” syndrome. I didn’t know what I didn’t know.

The vendor I ultimately chose answered the questions thoroughly, told me things I wasn’t even thinking about, and gave me a good feeling about the flexibility of the system.

Bottom-line
Ask someone — even though I didn’t, I should have. Hopefully the reference you use will provide you with the good and the bad.

Get a list of questions and send them to your salesperson. This gives you really good insight into how comfortable they are with the product. It also forces them to ask other departments. More than likely they won’t know how to address security or many technology questions, and this process also allows you to see how the company works internally somewhat; i.e. Was the salesperson able to easily find this information from the IT department?

Take your time and do as much homework as you can. Ask people in your specialty, and even more specifically, someone the same size as you.

Find out more about Derrick Berger and our other Practice Notes bloggers.

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