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EHR vs. EMR: what's the difference?

By IRVING WEISS, 1 January 2016

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The difference between an EHR (electronic health record) and an EMR (electronic medical records) vary greatly, although many use the terms EHR and EMR interchangeably. An electronic medical record EMR is a digital version of a chart with patient information stored in a computer, not a filing cabinet. An electronic health record (EHR) is a digital record of health information.

EMR (electronic medical record) Definition

The EMR or electronic medical record refers to everything you'd find in a paper chart, such as medical history, diagnoses, medications, immunization dates, allergies. While EMRs work well within a practice, they're limited

because they don't easily travel outside the practice. In fact, the patient's medical record might even have to be printed out and mailed for another provider to see it.

EHR (electronic health record) Definition

EHR or electronic health record are digital records of health information. They contain all the information you'd find in a paper chart — and a lot more. EHRs include past medical history, vital signs, progress notes, diagnoses, medications, immunization dates, allergies, lab data and imaging reports. They can also contain other relevant information, such as insurance information, demographic data, and even data imported from personal wellness devices.

The power of an EHR lies not only in the data it contains, but how it's shared. EHRs makes health information instantly accessible to authorized providers across practices and health organizations, helping to inform clinical decisions and coordinate care. An EHR can be shared with all clinicians and organizations involved in a patient's care such as labs, specialists, imaging facilities, pharmacies, emergency facilities, and school and workplace clinics.

An EHR is also necessary to meet Meaningful Use requirements. Meaningful Use is a Medicare and Medicaid program that supports the use of an EHR to improve patient care. To achieve Meaningful Use and avoid penalties on Medicare and Medicaid reimbursements, eligible providers must follow a set of criteria that serve as a roadmap for effectively using an EHR.

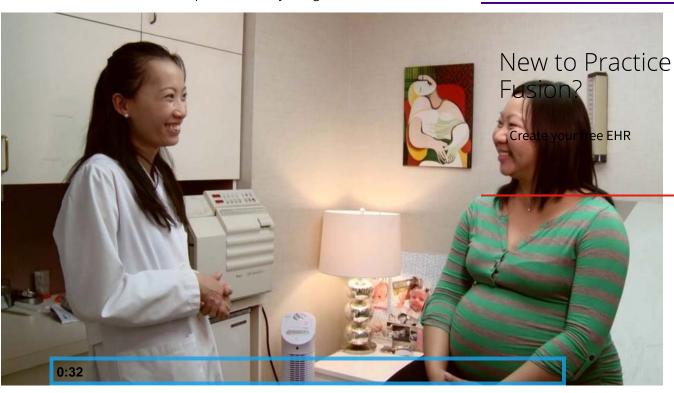Meet your ICD-10 ready EHR (http://www.practicefusion /blog/were-icd-10-ready-ehr/)

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- An electronic health record (EHR) (http://www.practicefusion.com

/electronic-health-record-ehr/) makes health information instantly accessible to authorized providers across practices and health organizations.

- It contains a patient's medical history, diagnoses, medications, treatment plans, immunization dates, allergies, radiology images, and lab results, among other medical information.
- EHRs are the future of healthcare because they provide critical data that informs clinical decisions, and they help coordinate care between all providers in the healthcare ecosystem.

EHR vs. EMR; usage trends

While both EHR and EMR are commonly used terms, the term "EHR (electronic health records)" is now referenced more frequently. This is likely due to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), as well as the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information (ONC) preference for the term "EHR". The CMS when speaking of health care reform, always uses the terminology, "meaningful use of an EHR". The ONC exclusively uses the terms "EHR" and "electronic health records", explaining that the word 'health' is more encompassing than the word 'medical'. The term "Medical Records" implies clinician records for diagnosis and treatment, while the term "Health Records" more broadly denotes anything related to the general condition of the body.

According to the 2014 Black Book Ranking (http://www.practicefusion.com /resources/Black-Book-Rankings-2014-Top-EHR-Vendors-PRIMARY-CARE-PHYSICIANS.pdf) report, 31% of practices have adopted an EHR. A fully functional EHR system goes beyond basic functionalities such as clinical notes and documentation and incorporates more of your practice workflows. With a fully functional EHR, your practice is more seamlessly integrated with other members of the healthcare community, helping to:

- Improve coordination of care

- Increase patient participation in care

- Improve the quality of care

- Increase efficiencies and cost savings

EHR vs. EMR; the advantages

EHR and EMR software systems have some disadvantages as well.

- Compared to paper records, a digital patient-record (EHR) system can add information management tools to help providers provide better care by more efficiently organizing, interpreting, and reacting to data.

- EHR software can provide clinical reminder alerts, connect experts for health care decision support, and analyze aggregate data for both care management and research.

- The more interactive an EHR system is, the more it will prompt the user for additional information. This not only helps collect more data but also enhances their completeness.

- EHRs are the future of healthcare because they provide critical data that informs clinical decisions, and they help coordinate care between all providers in the healthcare ecosystem.
- EHR systems focus on the total health of the patient. EHR software is designed to reach out beyond the health organization that originally collects and compiles the information. They are built to share information with other health care providers, such as laboratories and specialists, so they contain information from all the clinicians involved in the patient's care.

- The information moves with the patient—to the specialist, the hospital, the nursing home, the next state or even across the country. EHR systems are designed to be accessed by all people involved in the patients care—including the patients themselves.

EHR vs. EMR; the disadvantages

EHR and EMR software systems have some disadvantages as well.

- They are typically much more expensive to implement initially, as providers must invest in the proper hardware, training and support on top of the software unless their using our free EHR.

- Unless properly built, there's also the chance the system will malfunction, destroy all data.

EHR vs. EMR; the benefits

The EHR is the future of healthcare because they provide critical data that informs clinical decisions, and they help coordinate care between everyone in the healthcare ecosystem. An EHR has the following benefits over an EMR:

- **Health information and data**. The system holds what's normally in a paper chart – problem lists, ICD-10 codes (http://www.practicefusion.com/icd-10/),medication lists, test results.

- **Results management**. An EHR lets you receive lab results, radiology reports, and even X-ray images electronically while ensuring tests are not duplicated.

- **Order entry**. No more prescription pads. All your orders are automated using secure e-prescribing (http://www.practicefusion.com /e-prescribing/) technology.

- **Decision support**. Offer access to evidence-based tools to support clinical decisions (http://www.practicefusion.com/blog/population-health-management-comes-practice-fusion/). An EHR is smart enough to warn you about drug interactions, help you make a diagnosis, and

point you to evidence-based guidelines when you're evaluating treatment options.

- **Electronic communications and connectivity**. You can talk in cyberspace with patients, your medical assistant, referring doctors, hospitals, and insurers—securely. Streamline the workflow of providers as your system interfaces with everyone else's. Interoperability is the key word.

- **Patient support**. Engage your patients (http://www.practicefusion.com/patient-engagement/) by allowing to them to receive educational material via the EHR and enter data themselves through online questionnaires and home monitoring devices.

- **Administrative processes**. The system lends a hand with practice management (http://www.practicefusion.com/practice-management/) and helps avoid delays in treatments. Patients can schedule their own appointments and staffers can check on insurance eligibility.

- **Reporting and population health management**. How many patients did you treat for tuberculosis in 2014 How many of your diabetics have their HbA1c under 7? An EHR can provide the answers, thanks to a searchable database.

Choosing a fully integrated EHR goes beyond just the features — you'll need to evaluate the costs, required hardware, the complexity of implementation, and the available training and support. Learn more about how to choose an EHR. (http://www.practicefusion.com/blog/4-questions-ask-selecting-ehr/)

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