

Mining the most from EMRs — Share your tips on our new Wiki



Do electronic medical records (EMRs) add value to patient care or not? It depends on how they are used.

Recently I saw a physician's exemplary use of the EMR to improve patient care.

Robin Mitchell, MD, is a family practitioner at Spokane Valley Family Medicine. As I audited a small sample of her charts for clinical documentation,

I noticed how thoroughly they'd been updated to support planned care for prevention and chronic disease management.

As I checked to see if one of Dr. Mitchell's patients with diabetes had received the appropriate planned care, I could quickly see that all issues were up to date and determine when each item was next due in the flow chart tab. The flow chart even included a Pneumovax vaccination administered in 1997. It also included information about her colonoscopy and other preventive screenings.

In fact—through the flow chart tab—I could see the status of every one of her patients in terms of planned care for prevention and chronic disease management.

Dr. Mitchell invests a lot of time to keep these flow charts up to date. It's a very significant burden on her time, but she's doing the right work. As I spoke with her about her investment in this work, it was clear to me that she gets great satisfaction from providing this essential aspect of care.

Having reviewed hundreds of electronic charts, my observation is that most EMRs have a flow sheet feature that's not being used. It doesn't matter which EMR vendor's product you use – they all have some functionality for flow charting. However, most practices haven't incorporated them into their team work flow. In most practices doctors aren't taking the time to do it themselves either.

To take full advantage of the EMR, we physicians must lead our clinics to create work flows for ourselves

and our support staff to use the EMR care tracking function, so that our patients get the right care at the right time.

If we don't, in the worst instances, EMR implementation results in less efficient care and automated bad documentation habits.

What might a workflow system look like at a leading-edge practice? Here's an example. The staff person who opens the mail finds a colonoscopy report. That person is responsible for entering the date the colonoscopy was done into the EMR flow chart and scanning the report into the EMR. Later, when that patient returns for acute care visits, the person who rooms the patient is accountable for seeing if the colon cancer screening for patients over 50 is up to date and alerts the provider if the screening is due.

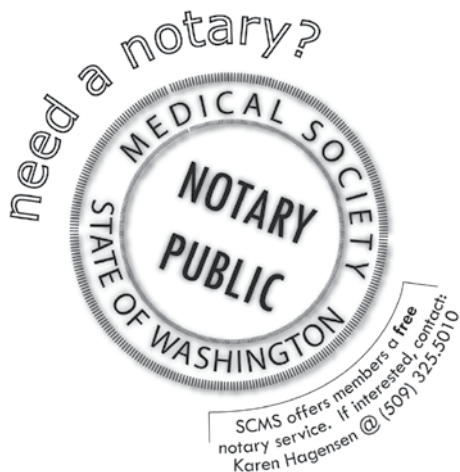
Using support staff in these ways can improve quality of care and help physicians use their time more efficiently by having the right clinical information at their fingertips during the patient interaction.

Share Your Ideas

Since many of us are currently deploying EMRs in our practice, let's share our collective wisdom. George McAlister, the Spokane County Medical Society System Librarian, has set up an "Implementing an EMR" Wiki for members to be our clearinghouse, so that you can meet others and get tips and resources online. Visit the Wiki at <http://implement-emr.wikispaces.com/>.

If you would like to join or contribute to the Wiki, contact George at george@spcms.org.

Brad Pope, MD, is medical director for Group Health Cooperative's Eastern Washington/North Idaho District, based in Spokane. Dr. Pope started as a family physician, with Group Health in Spokane, in 1983. He still practices part-time as an urgent care provider each week.



Member Wiki
Implementing An EMR
The Spokane County Medical Society

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Welcome to the Spokane County Medical Society's Member Wiki:
Implementing and Maximizing the Power of an Electronic Medical Record (EMR)

In recent years there has been a strong push throughout the healthcare industry for doctors to convert to an electronic medical record (EMR). Most medical practices have accumulated and continue to produce a significant volume of paper records. These records, from patient charts to insurance information, lab results to medical histories, pose challenges for storage, maintenance, accessibility and usability. There are significant information redundancies, low availability and weak security. These records have little or no safeguards against loss or destruction, are difficult to search and query. A transition to electronic medical records would solve all of these issues, but present a new set of challenges. Staff acceptance of the technology and acquiring a new skill set are just a few.

The PURPOSE of this member wiki is to:

- Assist in integrating and transferring existing, paper-based records into an EMR.
- Assist and encourage the use of tools provided in the EMR to the best advantage in patient care.
- Promote and encourage the development of team based work flows to transform the way clinics work, using the EMR as a tool to provide the best care to their patients.