

Top 5 Medical Tech Trends for 2012

A new year means a fresh start, and as 2012 inches closer, it's time to think about new IT approaches that will enhance your healthcare practice. Although the government reform may mandate that certain IT practices be implemented, other non-required initiatives will help to streamline workflows, save money and improve care in the new year. David Gracey, President and founder of Network 1 Consulting, an Atlanta-based IT consulting firm, suggests five IT initiatives healthcare providers should undertake in 2012.

1. ELECTRONIC MEDICAL RECORDS (EMRs)

With recent changes in healthcare policies and government incentives, many physicians are looking to switch to EMRs to help maximize productivity and to earn incentive payments as high as \$63,750 per qualifying physician. Using EMRs can save clinicians an average of 15 minutes of paperwork per patient and allow them to spend more time interacting directly with patients.

A successful EMR implementation, and actually qualifying for the money, isn't easy. Here are three key tools to getting it right:

1) Get the entire organization involved. An EMR touches almost everything involved with delivering patient care. Getting everyone updated and prepared for the change significantly increases the likelihood of success.

2) Install the right infrastructure. The EMR vendor's 'minimum requirements' typically deliver 'minimal performance'. Don't skimp here. The last thing you want is for the physicians to not like/use the system because it's too slow.

3) Look at the practice's current workflow and create a plan. Documenting current workflows, bottlenecks and workarounds – and addressing them before implementation – goes a long way toward a successful roll-out.

2. CHECK-IN KIOSKS TO SPEED UP PATIENT REGISTRATION AND INCREASE ACCOUNTS RECEIVABLE

Patient kiosks are a fast growing trend in healthcare. They are relatively easy to implement, require a small investment, increase employee productivity and deliver excellent patient satisfaction. Busy consumers who prefer user-friendly, automated technology can check-in for scheduled appointments and remit co-pays and outstanding balances electronically.

In many cases kiosks reduce collection costs and write-offs, which translates into more money for the practice.

"We installed kiosks to reduce wait times and increase patient satisfaction," states Marietta Miller, practice administrator for Georgia Kidney Associates. "In addition our staff gets more accurate patient information plus eligibility is verified at the time-of-service."



David Gracey

3. CLOUD COMPUTING

There is a lot of hype around "cloud computing". At its core, any application or data that is not housed locally can be considered a cloud service. There are many potential benefits, such as predictable monthly costs and improved reliability. There are also several drawbacks. One of the biggest concerns is the high cost of migrating to a different solution if the initial cloud solution doesn't work out. Here are three questions a medical practice should ask when considering a cloud service:

- 1) What if the cloud provider has a security breach?
- 2) What happens if they go out of business?
- 3) How hard is it to move data once it's in the cloud?

4. MOBILE DEVICES / TELEHEALTH SERVICES

As EMRs are adopted, doctors want patient information at their fingertips. TeleHealth services are making great strides to keep up with this demand. By the end of 2011 it is estimated that nearly 40 percent of all U.S. physicians will be using an iPad or similar tablet. "Going mobile" can be liberating and help deliver better patient care. Alternatively, making sure no patient data is compromised and all HIPAA regulations are met poses significant IT challenges.

5. DISASTER RECOVERY/ BUSINESS CONTINUITY

Recent weather events have impacted hospitals across the country. Mother Nature has delivered a cruel reminder that it's imperative for healthcare providers to have a disaster recovery (DR) plan in place. There are plenty of ways to protect data from the two most common types of disasters: file corruption and server crashes. A solid DR plan doesn't have to be expensive. For example, a plan that can tolerate four hours of downtime will be much less expensive than a plan that can tolerate four minutes of downtime. Start with the basics; have a plan and make sure to test the plan.

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