

# Should You Switch to a New Electronic Medical Record (EMR) System?

**Rate and Compare Your EMR to Help You Decide**



Choosing an electronic medical record (EMR) system is one of the most strategic decisions a medical practice makes, especially since the right system could improve productivity, increase revenues and enhance patient experience. If you are already using an EMR system and find yourself frustrated and wondering if there isn't something better, you're not alone. Nearly one-third of providers surveyed are dissatisfied enough with their EMR system to consider making a change, according to a Black Book Rankings' annual poll<sup>1</sup>.

Some common reasons behind physicians' dissatisfaction with their EMR systems include:

- **Lack of medical specialty functionality** – Trying to use an EMR system designed for general practice for a medical specialty is like trying to fit a square peg into a round hole; it just doesn't fit. You'll have to make lots of compromises and adjustments to make it work, and even then you'll be left with inadequate results.
- **Inability to accommodate your practice's needs or workflow** – An EMR system that doesn't enable you to do simultaneous processes will hold you back instead of improving efficiencies. An EMR system that lets you go from start to finish with an exam, including gathering patient information, uninterrupted physician-patient interaction, treatment options, fast and accurate documentation that supports proper billing, e-prescribing and printing drug and treatment advice for patients is what may most benefit your practice.
- **Unsatisfactory EMR vendor support** – Time is money, and you can't afford to have delays when questions come up about your EMR system. You also need a vendor who keeps you informed and trained, consistently updates your solution with improved functionality and not only listens to your feedback for continued enhancements, but also improves the system based upon your suggestions.
- **Not anticipating your needs or remembering your preferences** – Your favorite medical assistant knows how you like to work and remembers which medication you prefer to treat a certain condition. Training a new staff member takes time, and there's always an inevitable learning curve until the two of you get in a groove. An EMR system that doesn't remember your preferences from patient to patient is like starting each day having to retrain a new staff member. It's simply easier to work with a system that adapts to your style of practice and remembers your preferences.

It's likely you could add a few more reasons to the list, such as tedious typing to create documentation that isn't accurate in the end and doesn't support the billing and reimbursement you deserve, template-driven systems and cloned records that raise a

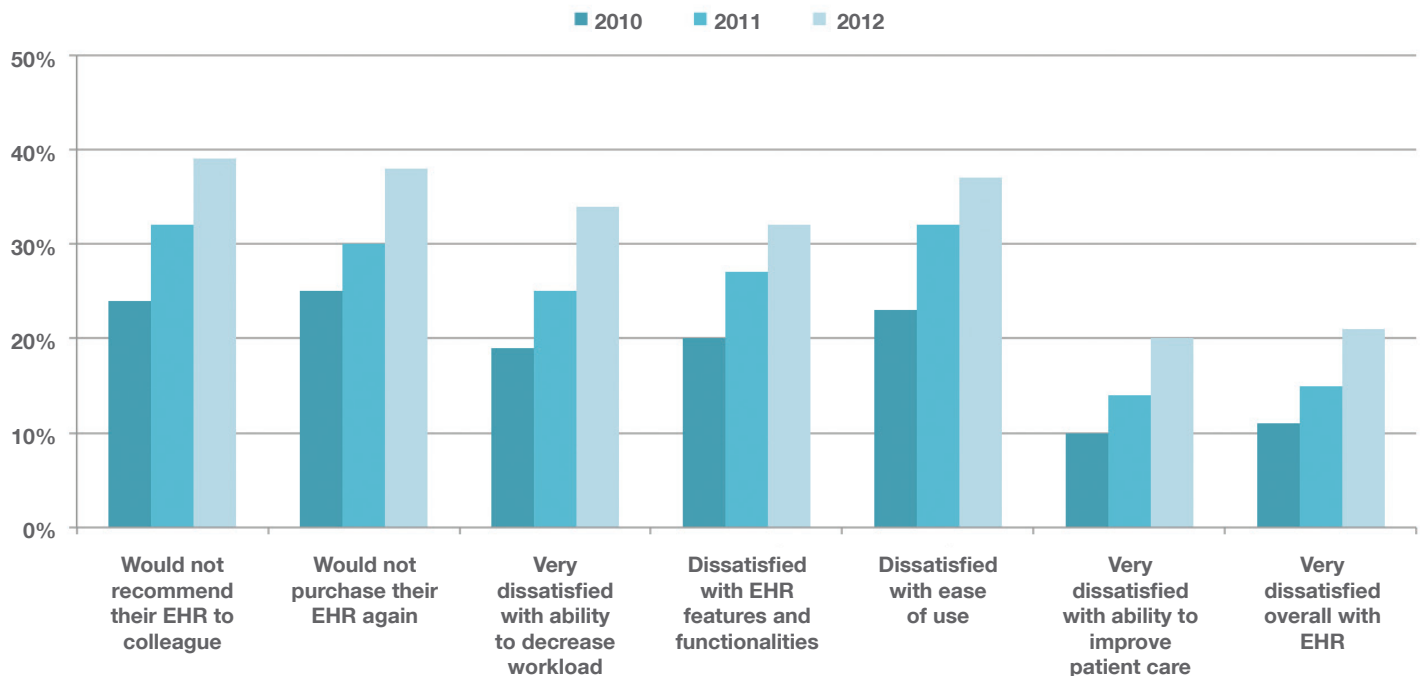
1. "2013: Year of the Big EHR Switch,"  
Black Book Rankings Research

*Sunk cost is money that has already been spent and cannot be recovered. Logic dictates that because sunk costs will not change – no matter what actions are taken – they should not play a role in decision-making.*

red flag for payers and inconvenient laptop or desktop systems that require added note making after the exam or at the end of your already busy day. Sound familiar?

Yet, even with all of the existing drawbacks, you might shy away from considering other solutions after the investment of time and money to research, select and implement your current EMR system. Another thing that might hold you back is simply the fear of change. Your EMR system may not be up to par, but you dread learning your way around a new one. However, if your EMR system is falling short, it may make sense to invest some time now to seriously evaluate your options and stop throwing good money after bad. Finding and selecting a new EMR system – one that has shown major advancements over older models – could re-energize your practice and save you time, money and headaches in the long run. Making a switch, although uncomfortable at first, may be the smartest action you can take.

### Growing Dissatisfaction with Electronic Health Record (EHR) Systems Among Physicians<sup>2</sup>

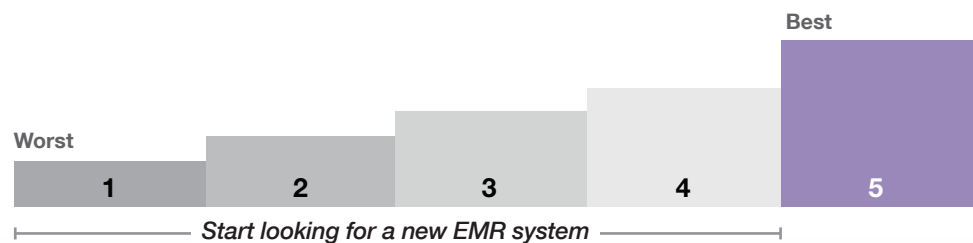


2. Holly May; "Why Electronic Medical Records Are Failing To Meet Expectations"; <http://rockhealth.com/2013/05/why-electronic-medical-records-are-failing-to-meet-expectations>

# Get Straight on What You Need

Before you abandon your existing solution and select a new one, get clear on what you need and want. What is your vision of an EMR system? What are the pitfalls of your current solution? Develop a written list of pros and cons. You can use it later in your vendor comparisons. To help you through the process, use the following questionnaire to rate your existing EMR system on a scale of 1-5, with “1” being the lowest/worst ranking and “5” the best possible ranking.

## Rate Your EMR System: on a scale of 1 - 5



1. Rate your EMR system on saving you time.
2. How would you rate your existing EMR system for having all of the diagnoses, treatment options and coding/billing functionality needed for your medical specialty?
3. How satisfied are you with your EMR system's workflow?
4. How confident are you that your EMR system codes and bills accurately for your greatest allowed reimbursement?
5. Rate your existing EMR system's ease of use.
6. Rate your level of confidence in your existing EMR system and vendor's readiness for transitioning to ICD-10.
7. How satisfied are you with your EMR vendor's responsiveness and support?
8. How likely would you be to recommend your existing EMR system to a colleague?

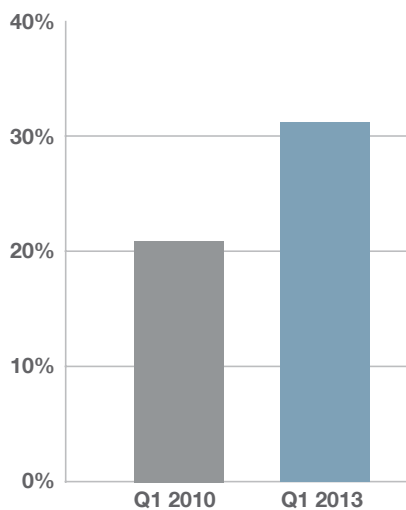
If you ranked your responses to questions 1-7 a “4” or below, start looking for a new EMR system right now. Any one of these factors is significant enough to slow you down and cost you time and money. Your EMR system should be helping you to increase revenues, improve patient care and meet government compliance regulations. At the very least, it should get you out of the office earlier, allow you to see more patients and improve the way you work.

The clincher is question 8. If you can't recommend your existing system without hesitation, why would you continue to use it regardless of how painful it is to switch?

# Legacy or Next Generation?

Is your current EMR system a legacy or first generation system, with only the most basic functionality? Or is it an innovative, next generation system that has the latest technology? Do a deeper dive into your assessment and determine how your existing EMR system stacks up in a legacy and next generation system comparison. Based on the chart below, which system are you now using?

## Providers Replacing EHRs



Melissa McCormack, *The Impact of the HITECH Act on EHR Implementations* IndustryView | 2013, <http://www.softwareadvice.com/medical/industryview/impact-of-the-hitech-act-on-ehr-implementations/>

*If you are still using a legacy system, you are missing out on some major advantages that you can only get with a next generation EMR system. And if you do decide to make the switch, make sure that your new system has all of the next generation benefits. If it doesn't, you may quickly become disenchanted and frustrated once again.*

## Legacy

- General purpose, not built for your specialty
- Server-based, requiring an investment in onsite hardware, IT support and potentially unexpected maintenance costs
- Text-based, requiring tedious typing to generate notes, slowing down documentation and exams and negatively impacting the patient experience
- Template-driven, not tailored to specific medical conditions
- Rigid, requiring you to navigate lengthy dropdown menus each time to identify your diagnoses and treatments
- Accessible only via computers or laptops, inhibiting your mobility
- Unprepared for future government compliance regulations, including ICD-10
- Manual or complicated billing and coding functionality, risking inaccuracy and potentially reducing reimbursements
- Provided by a vendor that is slow to update the system's functionality or design

## Next Generation

- Specialty-specific, with knowledge unique to your specialty and enabling you to create very detailed notes and documentation
- Cloud-based, requiring little investment in hardware or IT support and delivering regular software updates and enhancements
- Touch-based, with a graphical user interface that speeds documentation and enables you to interact more directly with your patients
- Designed to create unique, specific documentation and notes
- Adaptable, learning your unique style of practice, including your common diagnoses and preferred treatments
- Accessible via the latest mobile devices, including iPads for greater mobility
- Well-positioned to help you comply with future government regulations, including ICD-10
- Built with an intuitive coding system that automatically transfers documentation into the correct code, maximizing reimbursements
- Provided by a vendor that is flexible, agile and responsive to customer recommendations



# Cost/Benefit Analysis

Once you've decided that your existing system isn't serving you, there still may be nagging reservations holding you back from making a change. Even if your current EMR system isn't working out, it's understandable that the idea of switching probably isn't a welcome thought. Change of any kind is uncomfortable. It's easy to rationalize our way out of it as a means of avoidance. So push yourself to challenge your hesitation. You'll be glad you did in the end. Make note of all of your concerns and then address them with a thorough and honest cost/benefits analysis. Some of the top issues may include:

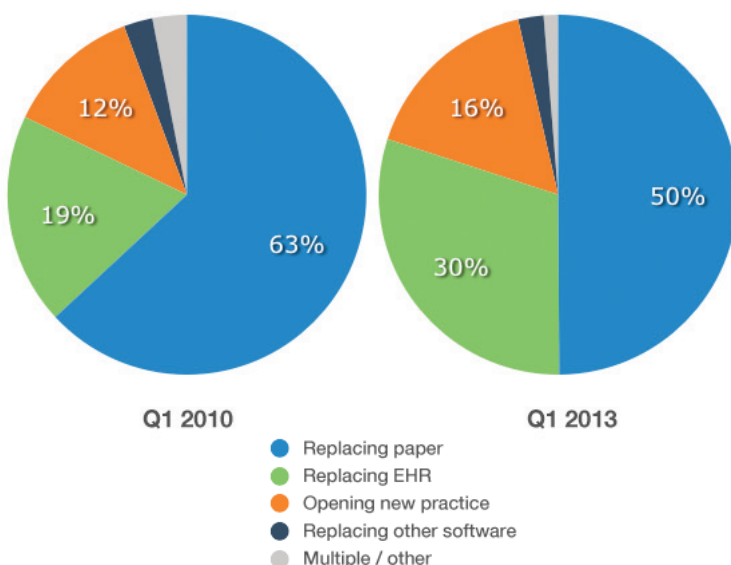
**Cost** – Perhaps you purchased an on-premise EMR system and invested a lot of money in server hardware and other IT infrastructure. Or maybe you are using a cloud-based solution, but one that lacks the features and functionality you need for your specialty. Although it probably feels painful to call it a loss and walk away, that may be the smartest financial decision you can make. The greater cost may be to continue to use a system that is inefficient and doesn't deliver the savings and conveniences you need. The pain you experience transitioning to a new system will likely be short-lived and worth the trade off for the long-term benefits.

**Discovery, Decision and Implementation** – You're in a busy practice; how and when will you find the time to evaluate, choose and implement another EMR system? The time investment will likely be worth it if you are frustrated with your existing system and know there is something better. Delaying a perceived pain with existing pain just doesn't make sense. Plus, now that you have evaluated what you have and what

you want, you know exactly what to look for. And you're already experienced with using an EMR, so choosing and implementing a new one may be a faster and more painless process than the last time around. If you have someone in your practice you can appoint to research systems to create a short list, you can save time to do what you do best: treat patients.

**Existing Data** – You may have concerns about how to transfer the data from your current EMR system into a new one, but data transfer and retention is a common occurrence. There are several ways this is typically handled, each with different levels of cost. A full conversion of data may seem ideal, but it is also the least cost-effective and may be unnecessary. Look for a vendor that can provide options and know that once you are

**Reasons for Buying EHRs**



past the data issue, you will be on to a better system, the benefits of which will outweigh your concerns of data transfer.

**Building a Case for Change** – Building consensus among stakeholders that a change in your EMR system is necessary, or agreeing upon which system to switch to, may seem like a challenge. But if most providers in your practice are frustrated too, it may not be difficult to get them on board. If needed, you can make a list of all the shortcomings you've identified to convince any naysayers.

These concerns and others might seem overwhelming, but addressing them might be easier than you think. Don't let them stop you from exploring systems that can help you to save time, earn more money and exceed your expectations. And if you get discouraged, keep in mind that switching from one EMR system to another is a less dramatic change than moving from paper charts to an EMR system. You've already made the most difficult transition.

## The Selection Process

If you're ready to move on, there are some key questions to ask when researching a new EMR system and EMR vendor.

### EMR System

- Is it designed for your medical specialty?
- Does it have diagnoses, treatment options and coding/billing functionality needed for your medical specialty?
- Does it meet the specific workflow requirements of your practice?
- Will it save you time?
- Can you touch and swipe on an iPad interface instead of typing for fast and accurate documentation?
- Will it enable you to address government compliance regulations through 2014 and beyond, including Meaningful Use and ICD-10?
- Does it provide you with mobile access from almost any location, and via the latest mobile devices?
- Does it integrate well with your practice management system?
- Does it interface well with your path lab partners and pharmacies and give you e-prescribing capabilities?
- Will it help, not hinder, your bottom line?

### EMR Vendor

- Do they seem responsive to customer needs?
- Are they stable and viable for the long-term?
- Are they flexible, nimble and adaptable?



- How frequently do they release new updates?
- Do they have a community of users who have an opportunity to provide feedback for future developments?
- What is their system uptime?
- Do they follow best practices for confidentiality and security with encrypting data?
- Do they employ practices of redundancy, replication, continuous data backup, server load balance and planned downtime for maintenance at optimal off-peak hours to ensure availability to your system and data?
- Are they focused on private practice, versus large, hospital systems? Will they give you the attention you deserve?

## Moving Forward

Once a new EMR system has been selected, one of the most important things you can do is arrange for proper training and practice in advance. To ensure that any new system you select performs optimally for you, invest the time to train on it properly and practice, practice, practice – preferably well in advance of your go-live date.

Although it can be discouraging, your dissatisfaction with your current EMR system can be a positive. It can lead you to switch to an innovative, state-of-the-art system that can be a strategic asset to your practice. It can also help you to partner with a vendor who will help to ensure the success of your implementation. Instead of settling for less, your EMR replacement can help to reinvigorate your practice.

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