

Perusing the EMR Menu

With over a dozen choices, it's hard to find one that's right for you. Here are resources to help.

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It seems that EMR is the cauliflower of medical practice these days: everyone knows it's good for you, but no one wants to order it. The budget is tight and there are tastier things on the menu, so it gets passed over again and again.

Well, ever since the federal mandate to adopt EMR went into effect earlier this year, ophthalmologists have resigned themselves to acquiring a taste for it before too long. And it certainly helps that the government added a little sauce to make it more palatable. Starting in January 2011, federal subsidies toward EMR purchases begin, thanks to a \$20 billion push for implementation of health information technology that was part of the federal stimulus package passed early this year. Come 2014, any lingering refuseniks will be hit with penalties for failure to adopt EMR, so there's all the more incentive to dig in now.

But that doesn't make the task any easier. Many ophthalmologists are waiting to see which software package in a crowded field emerges as the industry leader before committing to such a practice-altering event. Some early adopters have buyer's remorse after trying EMR a few years ago, only to find it little more than an expensive albatross, and are unenthusiastic about giving it another go. But take heart: next month, the office of Health and Human Services plans to stipulate interoperability standards for EMR systems to ease some concerns about their long-term viability.

Since many EMR vendors will be attending the AAO annual meeting this month, that'll be a good place to question them and test out their wares to determine which might be a good fit with your practice. To help, we've provided two resources for you in the pages that follow.

First up is a page with 20 key questions that independent consultants recommend asking of each vendor that you consider. Any EMR vendor worth its salt must be able to answer these questions in a way that satisfies the practice. Clearly, you will have many additional questions specific to your practice, but if a vendor can answer these to your satisfaction, they're probably worthy of

further consideration. We recommend you bring a copy of this questionnaire to each vendor and use it to guide your discussion.

Following that, below, is a chart comparing 18 different EMR systems that includes a little company background, highlights of key features, pricing strategies and technology requirements. Bear in mind that it's not a soup-to-nuts comprehensive guide, just a sampler. The companies can and should provide more detail.

Lastly, we're polling our readers to find out your top concerns about EMR so that we can serve you better with targeted editorial coverage in 2010. Please log onto www.opththalmologymanagement.com and take a brief survey. All those who enter are eligible to win an iPod touch.

If you'll be attending the AAO meeting this month, you can also stop by our exhibit booth (#4013) to pick up the reader survey plus extra copies of the "20 Questions" form for vendors. Or if you just want to chew the fat.

CCHIT Chat

A non-profit organization called the Certification Commission for Health Information Technology (CCHIT) has been certifying EMR systems for the past five years. State governments and private insurers who've been offering incentives to adopt EMR often require its stamp of approval. Currently, no eyecare-specific EMR system can receive certification from CCHIT because it is not a specialty sanctioned by the group. The vendors who are selling to ophthalmology practices and have CCHIT certification have obtained it through their ambulatory certification; that designation says nothing about its suitability for clinical practice. "While CCHIT does not test specifically for eye care, we plan to work on this specialty in the next year or so," says Sue Reber, marketing director for CCHIT.

Summary of Features, Prices and Technology Requirements of Selected EMR Systems

Company Name	Eyecare Practices as % of Customers	Years in EMR Business	Is It an Integrated EMR/EPM Platform?	Is the System Modular or All-in-One?	Can the System be Customized by Users?
Medinformatix	30%	17	Yes	EPM & EMR built on a single database but available individually. Can also connect to third party EPM/EMR system.	Fully customizable; can easily be done by end users with minimal technical background.