

## Ready for an EHR?

# Tips for Selecting the Right System

Incentives in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 are enticing many oncologists to invest in Electronic Health Record (EHR) systems. So, how do you know which system is right for your practice?

### Plan the Process

Evaluating and implementing an EHR system is a significant endeavor, not only financially but also from a change management perspective. Determine who will lead the charge and assemble a team with representation from physicians, nurses, administration and research, if applicable. Set specific goals and clearly outline the evaluation process.

### Set Your Priorities

Each team member will likely have different priorities for key functions of the system. Physicians may want a system that facilitates treatment decision support, regimen management, and efficient clinical documentation. Nurses may focus on easy access to patient records, regimen scheduling and admixture information. Administrators may be most interested in financial opportunities such as revenue cycle enhancement and charge capture functionality. Defining and prioritizing these wants and needs will aid evaluating each vendor's system.

### Decide Between Oncology-specific or General EHR System

Some EHR systems are general, for use in any type of physician practice, and may offer an oncology module geared toward supporting the specific requirements of oncology practices. Other systems are oncology-specific, meaning they are completely developed around

the oncology workflow and are only implemented in oncology practices.

Assess the priorities your team has established to determine which type of system will best meet your goals. For example, if treatment decision support is a priority, an oncology-specific system that includes tumor-staging tools, chemotherapy dosing and administration, toxicity assessment and management, and tools for protocol management should provide the support you need. If your practice offers clinical trials or routinely screens patients for trials, an EHR system with oncology-specific clinical trial management components can help increase patient accruals by automatically screening for potential study enrollment.

### Evaluate Experience

Increased demand for EHR systems has led to an influx of vendors entering the market. Although this offers more choices, you'll want to be sure to choose a vendor with proven experience implementing these systems in other oncology practices. Many practices discover that the costs of implementation, both in time and money, far exceed what they had expected when third-party vendors are required to facilitate the process. Instead, an EHR vendor with an in-house implementation team that has already brought thousands of users onto its EHR platform is more likely to follow a proven and robust implementation process that minimizes patient disruption and increases the chance of implementation success.

Additionally, partner with a vendor with clinical experience who will easily understand your practice's specific

## Questions to Ask EHR Vendors

- How long has your EHR been available to community oncology practices?
- How many systems have you implemented in oncology practices?
- What clinical background does your team have?
- Is your implementation team on staff, or is it outsourced?
- Are upgrades included in the scope of services?
- Will you train our staff at our practice?

workflow. One-on-one training for physicians, as well as customized training specific to the respective staff positions and workflow, reduces time away from patient care and ensures a deeper understanding of the EHR system throughout the practice.

### Look for a Long-term Relationship

Your relationship with the selected vendor will not stop once the product has been installed. In fact, training and ongoing support are vital for a successful transition into the world of EHR. Training should be held at your practice by the vendor. Be wary of "train the trainer" scenarios or training via Web casts, and make sure sufficient training and support are included in the scope of the proposal. When evaluating proposals, sometimes it pays to look for what's missing in addition to what's included.

The benefits of EHR to the entire healthcare system are phenomenal. With the right commitment and forethought, your practice can ensure a smooth adoption of this technology and be at the forefront of a future that includes nationwide EHR.

—Cynthia Chavez, Vice President of iKnowMed at US Oncology



**Cynthia Chavez** is Vice President of iKnowMed, a division of US Oncology. In this role, Chavez oversees the development and implementation of the electronic health record system iKnowMed, an oncology-specific EHR software application acquired by US Oncology in 2004. Implemented by more than 900 oncology providers and thousands of staff to date, iKnowMed is now being offered to the greater oncology community. This application is supported by a technical team based in Berkeley, Calif. and Houston, Texas, along with a nationwide team focused on implementation and customer support.

Prior to working with US Oncology, Chavez was practice director at Rocky Mountain Cancer Centers for five years. As practice director, Chavez managed cancer centers throughout the Denver metro area. In this role she was also responsible for selecting and managing the implementation of an EHR for the cancer centers. She has also worked with Steadman Hawkins Clinic in Colorado as a practice administrator.