



How to protect your EMR investment.

I can just imagine what each of the doctors investigating EMR systems today must be thinking. This process is like buying a car, salesman after salesman tries to become our friend and build a trusting relationship within 10 minutes to get you to buy *the car* with the biggest commission for themselves. How you deploy this new mandate will set your practice down a path that is hard to get off and may be catastrophic if not the right path. Besides getting into compliance with HITECH legislation and the new government encouraged (author interpretation "mandated") **Electronic Health Records**, what are you hoping to accomplish or hoping to avoid, if anything, with this effort. Well in the past I have had many experiences with new software deployment. Some were great time savers and true profitable solutions, some not so much.

This whole idea that the government is the entity that is forcing this issue is somewhat surprising knowing that more than 70% of all software development programs in the government are massive failures give me shivers thinking that they presume to know what is best for society in total. But I do believe that moving to EMR is the right decision for many reasons. Let me list my top compelling drivers for adoption to EMR:

- 1) Reducing medical mistakes
- 2) Creating a more empowered consumer
- 3) Developing matrixes for condition treatment
- 4) Reducing paper costs
- 5) Making critical information portable, accessible and real time
- 6) Taking the steps to make electronic decision based treatment models possible

Will this first "bit at the apple" live up to the potential? Of course not, was the Model T the best Car? It was a good move in the right direction for an industry that now has produced a million dollar Porsche.

!!!!WARNING!!!

The potential for failure looms large for any technology project which compels me to share this with you. This is a story about my deployment of Great Plains Dynamics accounting software way back in the mid 90's. The company I was running had grown past the Microsoft Profit accounting package that we started with because Profit lacked inventory control. I wanted to make the one choice that would allow us to become a first class computer systems integrator and handle our needs for the foreseeable future. Our



2721 Copper Creek Road Herndon, VA 20171
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goal was to have a web accessible, real time tool that all our customers could use to track orders, payments and statements. Our major competition had deployed Oracle Financials and had those capabilities up and running. We did our research and settled in on the “next generation” software from Great Plains. We called the company and were referred to an “authorized” Great Plains consultant in our area that would help in our deployment and conversion.

Our first meeting with Abdul was very promising with all our fears of the deficiencies in the software elevated as our management team asked question after question. After paying for the software and paying the consulting fees, which amounted to more than \$60,000 our deployment fell flat as feature after feature, which were never a part of the software failed. Our calls to Abdul were not returned and after finding out he had gone to Israel to work his magic there. The Great Plains Software Company did refund part of our money for the software that we bought. The bulk of what we spent in cash was gone not counting the hundreds of hours that our team spent trying to get a system, that was not as represented, to fit. Ultimately we gave up and switched to package that had been written in Cobalt a decade earlier and was definitely, as they say “long in the tooth”. This was exactly what I was trying to avoid 6 months earlier when I went looking for a system. So there we were 6 months and an estimated \$100,000 down the drain we were running an ancient accounting package that produced statements but had no web capabilities at all. The only saving grace was that we were getting our statements out and able to file taxes.

Now, I trust no salesperson and do all the research myself and won't even buy software unless I have tested it and know that it does what it says it does, or at least does what I need it to do. How does this relate to your medical practice that is faced with complying with the HITECH legislation and the Medicare/Medicaid payment incentive? You are faced with the same dilemma that I was in the mid 90's. How do you protect yourself from the Abduls of the world and make sure you are compliant with the government mandate?

I have been in the technology field since 1986. I have seen ideas come and go and some ideas stay around for awhile. We are right at a tipping point in document (i.e. medical records) storage and retrieval that will drastically change how we retrieve documents in ***the very near future***. This creates a situation that puts you face to face with making what could be a costly purchasing mistake. What would I do if I were in practice and faced with the prospect of needing to make this change? I would be very careful of the “first bit at this apple” there are worms in that apple.

I reviewed current standards like ChartLogic and eClinicalWorks and respect their product. But for me a major cash investment in software and hardware and a plan on how to manage those assets can be avoided by going to a service provider model over the internet. Very simply the Application Service Provider (ASP) allows you to use your web browser to access an application that is hosted at the ASP location and not based on your operating and managing the application. Think of them as your geeks on the net that give you the product that you need without the payroll expense.



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But what can you do to comply and not waste your money and avoid getting screwed? I found that solution in PracticeFusion a completely free web based EMR program that allows you get compliance without that major commitment of money. PracticeFusion also includes **eprescribing free** in the package. How can they afford to provide you with all this? They have an advertizing banner on the bottom of your computer screen that pays for the service. You can choose not to have the advertizing banner by paying a small fee for access per month if you like.

The reason this makes sense in my mind is you can scan your current records into a PDF format that is portable to any database system you would want to deploy in the future. You can use the PDF investment to make sure you can change solutions if the future births a new technology to benefit your practice. Why is this important to be able to change solutions in the future?

- 1) I don't trust the government to have the EMR compliance figured out for many years but by that time you will have lost money if you don't make a decision today.
- 2) This protects your practice from any vendor going out of business.
- 3) The industry of database management, searches and retrieval is changing so rapidly that what you deploy today will not be a viable product in 5 years.

That last statement needs some clarification. We have all known the stratospheric rise of Google and its dominance of internet search. The same technologies that make Google and Desktop searches is going to totally change how information is going to be gathered and retrieved in the future. HIPAA creates some interesting security issues with unstructured data but that issue will be addressed and a solution found. I see that whatever you deploy today will not be the solution of choice in 5 years and maybe 3 years.

Think about a solution that gets you into compliance doesn't cost you anything to deploy and allows you the freedom to change in the future. That is where my effort would be. The internet allows you to use your current existing hardware without upgrading and without hiring a PC expert to manage a new server and network that is often required with new software deployment. Not just the upfront cost can be saved! How much do you know about securing medical data for HIPAA compliance? How much do you want to know? Let someone else provide that solution and stick to practicing medicine where you make your money. A significant cost of going electronic is converting your current records. By scanning those records to a searchable PDF format you can mirror your current file cabinets and records system and import them into any EHR system for compliance. But you can always get to them just as you do today in file folder. Our goal is to allow you access to your records just as you would today except they are in an electronic filing cabinet not physical one. We strive to make what you do today easy and faster by computerization not complex and burdensome with hours of learning new programs. **Ask us, go ahead and ask us.**

Richard Palmer rpalmer@imageworldllc.com



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