Creating a EMR Vendor Partnership for Effective IT Support

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By now, professionals in the healthcare field are aware of the benefits of a fully integrated EMR system. We also know that we are a ways off from 'fully integrated' and as we work toward achieving this goal we are experiencing growing pains. After the EMR vendor is selected and the contract signed, the hard work begins. Tried and true workflows, created pre-EMR era, are expected to flex with new system's functionality with the aim to not just simply mimic how tasks are performed in a paper-based world, but to bring about process improvements. Successful integration not only requires organizations to dedicate an agile staff to the adoption and maintenance of the EMR, but also that these end-users turn the vendor-client relationship into a partnership. Organizations can make the mistake of relying too heavily on the vendor to provide the expertise and guidance to solving their problems. Although EMR vendors do have wisdom to impart there is a real cost to playing a passive role in this relationship such as loss of productivity, financial costs and more importantly the possibility of negatively impacting patient care.

These consequences can be avoided by establishing an expectation, that requesting vendor intervention requires end user engagement. It should be seen as a partnership with the same goals.

Key factors to achieving favorable outcomes include:

• **Learn the organization's business structure**. Depending on the complexity of the request or problem, many departments can be involved in the resolution. As the client, understanding who plays what role can help you facilitate coordination between departments; and when working with larger vendors this might come in particularly useful as coordination can always be improved.

• **Your IT department should know EMRs.** Beyond networks and infrastructure, the IT department should be knowledgeable about your EMR. They can work with end users to resolve the more technical problems. Working together, with the EMR IT support they are more adept at quickly identifying and resolving the core problem. Nova Southeastern University's Masters in Biomedical Informatics can provide that necessary background education to help achieve these successful outcomes.

• **Be proactive with your requests.** Whether you are looking for new functionality or resolution to a problem, the outcome is affected by the timely and accurate feedback you provide. It can be easy to fall into 'I am the client, they can work around my schedule' line of thinking, but a speedy resolution requires both parties to be actively engaged.

• **Be accurate with your requests.** Requests for vendor assistance should come with the necessary pertinent and detailed information attached to it to avoid loss of productivity and miscommunication. There's a story of a user who called the support desk complaining that his keyboard had stopped working after he'd spilled coffee on it. After being told to turn the keyboard upside down and whack it sharply against the edge of the desk a few times to free up the keys, he complained that the computer now wouldn't work at all. It was only at that point that the hapless customer told the support representative that he was using a laptop.

Building a vendor partnership may require some additional effort by end-users, but the potential benefits of taking a more active role far outweighs the extra time. When you have a great partnership, the vendor's IT support team becomes an extension of your team, and this can result in new opportunities and benefits.

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