

QUESTIONS TO ASK EHR VENDORS

The following questions, compiled by the APA Committee on Electronic Health Records, are examples that psychiatrists can consider asking as they explore EHR vendors and products.

Functionality

Find out what the system does. It would be helpful to assess your current practice and have a sense of the EHR features that are your highest priority prior to communicating with vendors.

- Billing and coding, including DSM codes and axes
- Scheduling, including support for recurrent appointments
- *Patient demographics
- *Charting (e.g. problem list, psychiatry-specific templates including interdisciplinary treatment planning)
- Separating psychotherapy notes from the rest of the record
- *Prescription transmission to pharmacies (e-Prescribing)
- *Drug-drug and drug-allergy interaction checking
- Drug formularies (including inpatient and outpatient)
- *Order entry (e.g. Lab, Radiology)
- Receive results (e.g. Lab, Radiology)
- *Clinical Decision Support (e.g. alerts recommending action based on the patient's data)
- E-Communication with patients and/or other providers
- Reference materials (e.g. medication reference)
- Patient educational materials
- Patient-centered summary of visit or record
- Ability to capture patient's own descriptive language
- Report building (e.g. to identify all patients with a certain diagnosis or medication)
- Import/export from other systems
- Scan/store paper documents

(indicates item is part of core "Meaningful Use" requirements for Medicare/Medicaid EHR Incentive)*

General functionality questions:

- Which features (e.g. templates) can be customized?
- What mechanisms do you have in place to enforce privacy and ensure security of patient information?
- Can access rights be set at the data element level (e.g. diagnosis, medication)?

Technical Questions

- What kind of hardware is required to use the system?
- Does the system interface with other systems (practice management, hospital systems)?
- Is the system maintained and managed onsite or does it follow an ASP model (Application Service Provider, system maintained and managed offsite and accessed online)?
- Can the provider access the system outside of the office (remote access)? If so, how (eg. Internet browser on conventional computer, smart phone, tablet)?
- How is data entered into the system (e.g. manual entry, voice recognition, structured notes, scanner)?
- Who owns the records?
- Where are records stored (e.g. at the local practice setting; offsite at the vendor's setting; Internet via cloud computing)?
- Is access to the system and the records guaranteed 24/7?

Vendor Questions

- How many customers do you currently have? How many are psychiatrists?
- What size and types of practices use your product?
- Do you guarantee that your system will support the federal definition of "meaningful use"?
- Have you already or are you considering submitting your product for certification so that users will qualify for federal incentive (i.e. ONC-ATCB certified)?
- Do you provide references of existing customers?

Implementation/Training

- What resources do you have for training?
- What resources do you have for implementation?
- Do you offer ongoing technical support? What are the terms?
- What is a typical timeframe for implementation?

Cost

- What are the implementation costs (e.g. software license, installation, training)?
- What are the maintenance costs?
- If applicable, what are the costs for converting existing paper charts?

For more information: <http://www.psych.org/ehr>

To share questions, thoughts, or experiences with Electronic Health Records contact APA staff in the Department of Quality Improvement and Psychiatric Services: qips@psych.org.