

## Improving Patient Identification and Matching in Electronic Health Records

Patient identification and matching errors are an ongoing safety concern in healthcare. Although the complexity of the healthcare setting and volume of patients logically correlate to the scope of identification and matching challenges, even comparatively small healthcare practices can experience these mishaps. Misidentification can result in diagnostic and treatment errors, patient dissatisfaction and lack of trust, unnecessary costs, billing inaccuracies, and loss of data integrity.

The broad adoption of electronic health records (EHRs) across healthcare settings has introduced an added layer of complexity to patient identification and matching due to an increased volume of patient data, new workflows, information exchange, lack of standardization, and usability factors.

To proactively address these issues, healthcare administrators, providers, clinical staff, health information technology staff, and EHR vendors can work together to maximize safeguards for patient identification and matching. Use the following checklist questions<sup>1</sup> to identify potential opportunities for improvement within your organization.

	Yes	No
Does your organization have up-to-date policies and procedures for patient identification and matching?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your healthcare organization use a centralized database and a master patient index that includes standardized information to facilitate patient identification and matching?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are data entry fields that support patient identification and matching mandatory in the system?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Yes	No
Are technological and/or manual procedures in place to help reduce data entry errors (e.g., “check digit” verification or two-person signoff protocols)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do patients have at least two, and preferably more, identifiers associated with their records (e.g., name, data of birth, health record number, and mobile phone number)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your organization require picture identification or biometric identification (e.g., fingerprint or iris scanning) to authenticate patient identity?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your organization have a process for assigning temporary patient identification numbers during emergencies or when insufficient information is available to establish permanent records?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are protocols in place for (a) merging information associated with temporary identification numbers with permanent records once established, and (b) tracking temporary identification numbers to ensure resolution?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your organization have policies and safeguards to help prevent providers and staff from creating duplicate patient records (e.g., EHR alerts that notify providers about patients with similar names)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your EHR system monitor for records that have similar demographic data but contain name variations (e.g., nicknames or changed last names)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your EHR system alert users if they are trying to create a new record that has similar demographic data to another record?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your EHR system provide an alert if a user’s search returns multiple results?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are protocols in place to help identify unintentional duplicate records and combine the information into one record?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your organization have a process for unique identification issues that may occur (e.g., a <a href="#">transgender patient</a> whose legal name and preferred name differ)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do records clearly indicate if a patient is deceased, either through a visual cue (e.g., a distinct background color) or an alert?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Yes	No
Does your EHR system allow providers to create custom patient lists (e.g., by location or service)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can providers/staff sort patient lists in a clinically relevant order (e.g., by appointment time or room number) rather than by name to reduce the proximity of look-alike/sound-alike entries?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If patient lists are sorted by name, is special formatting (e.g., font color, row color, etc.) used to differentiate patients on adjacent lines who have the same name?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your EHR system clearly display patient identification information prominently on all user interfaces?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your EHR system include safeguards that prevent providers from having multiple patient records open at the same time, which can increase the risk of entering data in the wrong record?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your EHR system use distinct visual cues to distinguish between the production (live) environment and any testing or backup environments?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are patient identities verified at key points of care and during transitions of care using technology (e.g., barcoded wristbands) and manual processes (e.g., quality checks and signoffs)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are patients and families educated about the organization's patient identification and matching process and their important role in providing and verifying accurate information to assist with identification?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are patients and families encouraged to speak up about missing or incorrect information, or unexpected tests or procedures?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are <a href="#">interpreters and auxiliary aids</a> provided for patients who have communication barriers?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your organization train providers and staff members on patient identification and matching policies and procedures at hire and periodically?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Yes	No
Are registration clerks trained in a consistent data entry approach across different platforms and portals?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your organization include monitoring for and resolving patient identification errors as part of its quality improvement initiatives?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are patient identification and matching errors that occur in your organization shared with providers and staff members so they can better understand how and why these errors occurred?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your organization’s leaders engage providers and staff members in discussions to identify patient identification barriers and develop solutions?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<sup>i</sup> The Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology. (2016, September). Self-assessment: Patient identification. *SAFER Guides*. Retrieved from [www.healthit.gov/sites/default/files/safer\\_patient\\_identification.pdf](http://www.healthit.gov/sites/default/files/safer_patient_identification.pdf); ECRI Institute. (2016, June). Patient identification errors. *Health Technology Assessment Information Service Special Report*. Retrieved from [www.ecri.org/Resources/HIT/Patient%20ID/Patient\\_Identification\\_Evidence\\_Based\\_Literature\\_final.pdf](http://www.ecri.org/Resources/HIT/Patient%20ID/Patient_Identification_Evidence_Based_Literature_final.pdf); Monica, K. (2017, April 25). Researchers discuss problems, solutions to patient identification. *EHR Intelligence*. Retrieved from <https://ehrintelligence.com/news/researchers-discuss-problems-solutions-to-patient-identification>; ECRI. (2016, September). *Self-assessment questionnaire: Patient identification*. Retrieved from [www.ecri.org/](http://www.ecri.org/); ECRI. (2021, June 29). *Essentials: Patient identification*. Health System Risk Management – Guidance. [www.ecri.org](http://www.ecri.org)

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