

Using an Electronic Health Record System to Support Quality Improvement

In addition to storing patients' healthcare information, electronic health records (EHRs) offer opportunities to collect and analyze data. These activities are at the core of delivering quality patient care, preventing errors, and minimizing risk. Yet, the challenge for healthcare practices and organizations is understanding how to aggregate and evaluate the data, analyze the results, and develop strategies and initiatives that will help support quality improvement (QI).

QI relies heavily on auditing. Typically, the term "auditing" has been associated with the financial aspects of business. However, ongoing validation of clinical information through auditing also is important from both continuity of patient care and risk perspectives. The following checklist can help guide healthcare providers in using EHR systems to enhance auditing and QI activities. Learning how to make the best use these systems may increase patient safety and satisfaction, reduce the likelihood of billing issues and/or fraud allegations, and support reimbursement.

	Yes	No
<i>Electronic Health Record Systems</i>		
If you are considering an EHR upgrade, or you are purchasing an EHR system for the first time, has your practice talked with potential vendors to ensure obtaining the optimal features that support quality monitoring and risk reduction?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your practice review with the healthcare team the original objectives for implementing an EHR system?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your practice have working knowledge of the data elements and definitions associated with its EHR system?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Yes	No
Quality Improvement Committees/Auditing Processes		
Has your practice established QI committees that meet routinely and report back to staff about activities and progress?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your practice have an audit policy, and is it using auditing to identify areas for improvement and develop action plans?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the entire healthcare team – including healthcare providers, clinical and administrative staff, and staff members responsible for EHR implementation and maintenance – participate in audits to ensure the best audit design and patient outcomes?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are quality measures clearly defined so that more than one person can produce the measure results without difficulty?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your practice establish a goal for each quality measure to determine whether the measure is relevant and whether the information gathered will be useful?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your practice establish a target (numerical value of a quality metric) to determine the significance of the actual audit results?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are the following considered when establishing the target: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence-based literature related to the specific measure? • Knowledge of “best practice” results in comparable settings? • Historical data within your healthcare practice? • Knowledge of external requirements (e.g., pay-for-performance benchmarks)? 	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Does your practice have an audit document that includes the measure, the definition of the measure, the goal, and the target compliance number or percentage?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your practice consider the method that it will use to obtain necessary data?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Yes	No
<i>Audit Reports (continued)</i>		
If data cannot be automatically calculated and manual calculation or counting is required, does your practice specify appropriate sample sizes for various measures?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do all providers and staff members understand that the practice’s privacy and confidentiality policies apply to all auditing activities, including the generation of reports?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Analysis, Communication, and Improvement</i>		
Does your practice conduct ongoing analysis of both the audit framework and the audit results?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has your practice determined key questions to consider when analyzing audit results, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are we getting better or are we getting worse? • Can we see the effect of our latest action step(s)? • Where are we compared with our established target? 	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Has your practice determine how best to display audit results for both analysis and subsequent communication?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your practice have a positive communication strategy for sharing aggregate and individual results from audits?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your practice use the data collected during auditing to develop action plans and monitor the results of corrective actions?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Resources

For more detailed information and examples of audit measures, see MedPro's guideline [Using an EHR System as a Quality Improvement Tool in Your Healthcare Practice](#). Other helpful resources include:

- [Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality: Using Health Information Technology to Support Quality Improvement in Primary Care](#)
- [The Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology: Capturing High Quality Electronic Health Records Data to Support Performance Improvement](#)
- [The Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology: Health IT Playbook](#)
- [The Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology: How Will Adopting Electronic Health Records Improve My Ability to Care for Patients?](#)
- [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration: Managing Data for Performance Improvement](#)

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