EHR Vendor Pricing Comparison

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Purpose of this Document

This document is a white paper on pricing of various EHR vendors.

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With an evidently growing number of EHR users in the HIT market, the vendors providing these EHRs are steadily growing. Setting aside billions as stimulus money, the federal government has given physicians substantial incentives to switch to EHRs.

As there are practically more than a 1,000 Electronic Health Record vendors in the market, practices are facing a tough time deciding which vendor to go for.

As an independent consultant, I was commissioned by a well-known practice to evaluate EHR vendors in the market. I used primary research methods such as first-hand interviews, telephone interviews and live product demonstrations. Independent research organizations were consulted to compare different EHR vendors.

The following EHR vendors were evaluated:

1.   Athenahealth
2.   eClinicalWorks
3.   CureMD
4.   NextGen
5.   Practice Fusion

I'll guide you through the process I experienced while trying to get a pricing from each vendor.

Vendors Evaluated

1. **Athenahealth**

2. **eClinicalWorks**

3. **CureMD**

4. **NextGen**

5. **Practice Fusion**

1. Athenahealth

Athenahealth is a web-based provider of EHR, PM and billing, often ranked amongst the top 10 vendors in the market.

Calling Athenahealth resulted in a call-back from the sales team after around 5 hours. When I asked for pricing, I was told that I would have to sit through a 30-minute product demonstration before I could get a quote. Meanwhile, I tried to find Athenahealth's pricing on their website but couldn't find anything. A couple of days later, after having set up a conference call with one of their sales managers, I was able to see the product and found out that they follow a business model that mainly charges clients for their billing services, the amount which includes (and makes you eligible for) their integrated EHR and PM services. So, if you require a standalone EHR or PM, you cannot do that with Athenahealth- you will have to get their Billing services first.

After further research, I found out that Athenahealth does not have free technical support, and its users have been facing usability issues due to the system becoming complicated. They have poor customer support, and charge separately for even the most trivial services.

Verdict

Athenahealth is a good company to work with if you are a hospital or a multiple-physician practice as the cost is divided evenly. However, it has been designed keeping in mind the workflow of large practices and might not have the best user experience for small ones. Athenahealth charges 4—7% of the total practice revenue for their billing services, which includes the rest of its products. Due to their high prices, and the fact that they charge extra for other products and services, Athenahealth is not good for small-to-medium scaled practices who cannot afford to pay separately for simple additions to the software.

2. eClinicalWorks

eClinicalWorks, like Athenahealth, has started featuring in the top EHR category in the past few years. The company has done well in terms of marketing itself in trade shows and in the industry with a highly persuasive sales team willing to give you a demo in the comfort of your home-even at odd hours. Thus, in terms of the sales and marketing efforts, Kudos to the eClinicalWorks team.

I only wish that the product and service was as great. I have been in contact with a lot of disgruntled users complaining about their lack of support. A friend of mine, who had used eClinicalWorks at his small-scale practice, fumed at the company and said that its inconsistency was unparalleled. For example, some keyboard shortcuts, which worked perfectly fine in some templates, did not work in others, and some keyboard hotkeys, which are standard across all software, resulted in random results.

They advertise a standard charge of 2.9% of annual billing collections for their clients. However, what they do not mention is that you must be earning a specific amount of money each month to qualify for this. Make sure to question them about this. In my opinion, after looking at an eClinicalWorks price comparison, the actual cost eventually amounts to the standard 4 - 7 % rate in the market and is just brilliant marketing rather than a good deal for the practice. Also, their recent Version 10 upgrade has many bugs which the company has been slow to address, leading to unhappy customers.

Verdict

eClinicalWorks has shown tremendous growth over the past few years. However, I am skeptical whether this growth has been due to the quality of their product or just a brilliant marketing and sales strategy.

3. CureMD

CureMD provides EHR and PM solutions in a bundled suite, along with a Billing service that utilizes their own in-house clearinghouse.

In terms of market share, CureMD is not the same size as perhaps Athenahealth, but from what I saw in the software, they have a robust system that is user-friendly and interoperable with affordable pricing options. Their new version 10G boasts of a highly usable interface that, according to some doctors who have tried, is of very good quality.

Looking through their website I found the pricing options easily. I found out that they have two separate pricing options for physicians (with upfront cost and with no upfront cost). This is a good pricing model as it gives physicians the flexibility to choose a suitable pricing package.

In terms of the product, the system seems easy to use. What really vowed me was CureMD's inbuilt E&M code calculator. Once a physician signs a provider note, you can simply click a button to generate the correct level of visit. Moreover, if you want to increase the E&M code, the system will recommend the exact way to do so. Their support has received good ratings in independent research organizations such as KLAS.

The downside to CureMD is that their marketing strategy has been based on internal referrals or targeting physicians only in the East Coast. Thus, there are not a lot of physicians aware of CureMD in the rest of the country. Subsequently, physicians automatically assume that CureMD is a small EHR vendor even though that is not the case. CureMD is a gold partner with Microsoft and promises best functionality on any Windows-based system. This raises a red flag for many Apple users; however I later found out that they cater to the iOS platform as well.

Verdict

CureMD has a good customer support. Everything is in-house, and there are no third parties involved. They even have their own clearinghouse and don't charge you separately. I recently came across an article and was surprised to see CureMD along the top 10 EHR vendors such as Athenahealth and McKesson, ranking in the top three for solo, small and medium sized practices.

The implementation period for the West Coast is slightly longer than from the rest of the country and takes 6-8 weeks to take the practice live, compared to 3-6 weeks in the East Coast.

CureMD caters to all specialties except dental.

4. NextGen

NextGen is a server-based provider of EHR and PM solutions for providers and hospitals only. Their system is Meaningful Use Stage 2 certified and boasts of a large user-base.

It was fairly easy to connect with a sales executive, who ran me through the system. From what the executive told me, along with further research, I found that the product was very expensive. One of the things that really bothered me was that NextGen required an upgrade to ICD-10. The system is already very difficult and not suitable for solo, small or medium-sized practices.

Reviews in clinical circles revealed that NextGen system not intuitive, unstable, and has many known issues. Their EHR is highly priced and has major functionality issues such as no customized dashboards.

Verdict

Being a very large provider, NextGen needs to up its game, work on its product, and increase their satisfaction ratings, which are continuously falling. They have iron-steel contracts that make it very difficult for existing customers to have access to their own data once they decide to switch their system.

5. Practice Fusion

Practice Fusion is known in the industry as a vendor that provides free software and makes money through its marketing services. They have a huge user-base and cater to many specialties with a business-model that revolves around advertisement.

On my fourth attempt, I finally got in touch with a sales representative who talked me through the company's history and what it offered.

Practice Fusion provides free web-based EMR and PM solutions. Their only product is the EMR, while they provide a PM service through Kareo. This actually changes the dynamics because when you get EMR+PM from Practice Fusion, you will have to deal with two different vendors – something which is painstaking if you face issues with the software.

Overall, it's an annoying experience dealing with two different vendors. What if you have a problem? Who do you go to? What if Practice Fusion and Kareo decide to part ways, what will you do then?

Users who have been using Practice Fusion have faced interoperability issues, poor support, lack of control over data, faulty mobile application and user-interface issues such as no flow-charts and difficulties in adding immunizations.

Verdict

Practice Fusion is highly appealing because they offer free software where as other vendors charge for it. They also have a really attractive and easy-to-use website. However, looking over some reviews on the internet had me wondering how many people actually liked the product and I found mixed reviews. Users had a common problem with a lack of functionality and buggy software.

However, to give the devil its due, the basic EHR is free and if your practice is looking to use the system for storing basic patient information and work on generic provider notes, Practice Fusion may be a good place to start. I would however, not recommend this product for specialties which require additional functionalities such as Pediatrics, Oncology, OB/Gyn, Dermatology, Cardiology etc.

Practice Fusion recently came up with the final version of their iPad application which is a plus for iPad users. The application allows clinical data entry and enables providers to work on their notes directly from the iPad. However, it is still too early to comment on how good the product is.

For physicians looking to select an EHR for their practice, they should keep in mind that the EHR they choose must be user-friendly, interoperable, certified, Meaningful Use compliant, ICD-10 ready and highly customizable. There are EHRs that you have to pay for, and there are EHRs that you can get for free. Remember though, free EHRs come at the cost of your practice, since they cannot offer the same features, functionalities, and user experience of a proper, paid EHR. When an organization invests in software, it shows in the software, and that software comes at a price. When an organization does not depend on the quality of its software to get its revenue – they sell it for free.

Any one interested to learn more about any vendor, please feel free to drop an email to docseanparker@gmail.com with your practice details.