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Don't overlook your legacy data during an EMR conversion
Three tips to start the conversation

▶ Implementing a new EMR is no small feat for any healthcare organization.

This significant investment — of both time and resources — has a lot of moving parts, each demanding attention. It's no wonder that throughout all the planning, capability matching, installing and optimizing you may not stop to think about your legacy data.

However, while EMR vendors do port over a chunk of your legacy data, they don't move it all. You'll need a plan that continues to provide your clinicians and staff access to, and the ability to work with, the data that didn't make it over to your new systems. For some, supporting and maintaining their legacy systems alongside their new systems presents a work-around. It's an expensive one, though, that merely delays the inevitable.

Before implementing that new EMR, here are three things to do to address your legacy data needs and shut down those legacy systems:

1 Take Inventory

This is perhaps the most crucial step in the implementation of a new EMR system. You've got to take the time to understand exactly what you have in terms of hardware, software applications and data. You'll need to be able to answer these questions:

- What type of servers do you have?

- Where are they hosted?

- In terms of the databases within those servers, how big are they?

- What, exactly, do they contain?

- Who will need access to these databases in the future?

- What data would you like to keep (i.e., what would be nice to have) versus what data you must keep for compliance?

2 Revisit your Retention Policy

HIPAA mandates healthcare organizations retain medical records for a minimum of six years, but many state policies extend far beyond this. When implementing a new EMR system, be sure that your organization's record retention policy is crystal clear. Keeping the data for the required amount of time isn't enough. Know how long you'll need to maintain access to and the integrity of your legacy data. Your information governance policies and procedures will ultimately drive how users will access legacy records and applications.

3 Focus on the End Goal

When migrating systems and data architectures, keep your focus on the end goal: Streamlining your IT infrastructure and reducing complexity by shutting down duplicative and/or outdated legacy systems. Having fewer servers decreases the amount of data strung across organizational resources, making that data more secure and more manageable. Overall, shrinking that IT stack reduces the risk of losing data, not to mention lowering your operating costs. With more robust, accessible data across your organization, your user experience will improve, too.

EMR implementations are huge undertakings with the highest of stakes and many organizations focus solely on the new EMR without a thought for what to do with the old ones or the data they contain.

These three tips will help you start the conversations you need to have about your legacy data sooner, rather than later in your EMR implementation project.

Doing so will smooth the transition to your new systems, ensure clinicians and staff continue to access and work with the legacy data they need and maximize the investment your organization has made in its new healthcare information technology.

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