

EHRs Help Improve Patient Care And Patient Satisfaction

by Dr. James Pamplin



Making a commitment to provide nothing but high quality care shows your patients that you're a chiropractor with a genuine interest in raising the quality of life for those you treat. It tells them that, as a healthcare provider, you put them first because you're willing to invest the time and effort necessary to make sure they're completely satisfied with their chiropractic sessions. But making your patients happy doesn't just benefit them – there are distinct advantages for you, the practitioner, as well. In fact, one piece of research found that higher levels of patient care are positively associated with the success of your chiropractic practice and the profits you're able to generate as a result.

Patient Satisfaction And Your Bottom Line

In this research, U.K.-based research firm Deloitte assessed patient ratings of hospital healthcare services for a period of six years (from 2008 to 2014). What they learned, after reviewing patient experiences, is that

healthcare facilities which earned "excellent" ratings had 2.9 percent higher net margins than those with "low" patient satisfaction ratings. And it doesn't stop there. This same study also found that healthcare agencies with higher patient satisfaction ratings "earn disproportionately more than they spend compared to those with lower ratings." So how can this finding be translated to your busy chiropractic office? The happier your patients are with their care, the more you stand to make over the lifetime of your career.

One way to increase your quality of patient care is by using electronic health records (EHRs). These types of systems benefit your patient in 4 different ways: more efficient documentation, faster records retrieval, more patient control, and automated health-related reminders.

More Efficient Documentation

Providing your patients higher quality care requires that you achieve a certain level of efficiency with your documentation. EHRs aid in this

efficiency by reducing human error because various software controls eliminate the need for healthcare information to be manually input into the system. EHR macros also enable the user to combine tasks, saving time and improving productivity. A Graphic User Interface (GUI) improves cognition. A publication by the University of Maryland's computer science program explains that "a good GUI makes an application easy, practical, and efficient to use." Improve efficiency, improve patient care, improve profitability.

Faster Records Retrieval

Have you ever had a patient discontinue your chiropractic services only to return years later? When that happens, are you able to easily access this individual's past records and thereby accurately assess his or her condition and how it has changed over time? If you use an EHR, your answer to that question is likely affirmative. However, if you rely on paper files to house your patient records and documentation, it's highly probable that retrieving the patient's

file requires a trip to the deep, dark recesses of the basement...if you're able to locate them at all. This is an unproductive and unnecessary use of your staff's time. EHRs keep your patient records at your fingertips, no matter how long it's been since you accessed them, and also give you quicker access to patient records, whether your goal is to read them or update them.

More Patient Control

Patients experience a higher level of patient care with EHRs partly because they have more control over their own health and recordkeeping. For instance, patient portals allow them to access their records any time of the day or night, not just during normal business hours when the office may be busy. Additionally, by offering online scheduling and the ability to complete digital intake forms, patients are able to manage these tasks when it is convenient for them. This eliminates your patients feeling rushed, and thereby makes their documentation and decisions more accurate.

Automated Health-Related Reminders

EHRs also offer the important benefit of automated health reminders. Patient reminders, provider reminders, and office reminders all help improve the quality and continuity of patient health care. Reminding patients of their appointments and the importance of continued care "can help individuals manage their health and health care," says the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, adding that these types of electronic notifications "serve as a liaison between patients, providers, and the health care system."

Provider reminders are needed to aid the practitioner in their clinical decision-making, e.g. an alert to re-examine the patient after a set period of time or an alert that a treatment is contraindicated based on a medical history. Additionally, office-related reminders helps staff monitor and

take action on special appointment or accounting needs. Needless to say, most all patients would appreciate being advised of a growing balance or an appointment that can't be met. Moreover, these reminders make managing administrative and billing information much less stressful for your staff.

Providing a higher level of care increases the value of your services to your patients, ultimately increasing your profits as a result. Using an EHR is just one way to raise that level, yet it's one that does so from multiple standpoints, making it more effective than other patient care improvement options.

Hardware To Use With Your EHR

Maintaining your records via an electronic health records (EHR) system offers many benefits for you and your chiropractic patients. The University of Florida's Morsani College of Medicine outlines just a few of the advantages of electronic patient files, some of which include making fewer errors; greater ease when keeping track of patients' conditions and overall health; improved doctor-patient communication; and having immediate access to patient information, thus saving time and improving productivity during and after treatment sessions.

That being said, there are certain pieces of hardware that, when used with your EHR, can maximize your system and experience, simplifying your network (and your practice) as a result. These pieces of hardware can be broken down by three key areas: your reception area, your waiting room, and your patient treatment rooms.

Reception Area Hardware

When it comes to your reception area, an EHR server is a must. Simply put, a server is the electronic device that is responsible for storing all of your patient and office records. In other words, it does for you what

a hard drive does for a computer, keeping all of your important information in one easy-to-access location. For the best possible user experience, this server should be a desktop computer. This enables you to access the system with greater ease while using a device that is stationary and difficult for someone to just "walk off" with.

Waiting Room EHR Recommendations

For your waiting room, the best hardware to use with your EHR system is two laptops. One should be a standard laptop that can be used for patients who are returning for care. The second should be a 2-in-1 laptop that, while available for use to patients coming back for follow-up, also addresses the needs of your new patients as well, by offering the ability to do tasks such as completing intake forms.

For these waiting room laptop devices, a monitor that is 12 inches or larger is recommended. Having a screen that is bigger in size improves the experience for patients with vision issues or difficulty seeing – they'll have an easier time reading the screen and following the prompts for required information. This reduces their reliance on your staff, thereby increasing office productivity, while at the same time empowering your patients to look after their own health-care needs.

Best Treatment Room EHR Hardware

For the best EHR user experience, it is beneficial to have a client machine in each of your treatment rooms. This gives you access to important and necessary patient information when it is most needed, i.e. during chiropractic treatment sessions. This client machine should be either a standard desktop computer or an all-in-one, namely, a computer monitor and hard drive in one unit rather than a computer that has a separate monitor and hard drive. It is also advisable to choose a computer with touch screen

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capabilities which allows you to more effortlessly navigate through the EHR. Additionally, the monitor on this computer should be twelve inches in size or larger; this is visually less demanding, and you will not have to squint to read your patient files. Also, a larger screen makes it easier to share information with your patients while in the treatment room, for example, when you're showing them their progress, using informational materials to enhance their understanding of treatment options, and/or discussing their needs.

One Final Piece That Puts It All Together

The one final piece of hardware that is absolutely necessary for a optimally-functioning EHR system, the device which brings all of these other pieces of hardware together, is a router. Basically, a router is the master communicator, sharing information from one device to the others. For the best experience possible, this router should be fairly new, or at least no more than five years old. As pointed out in the *Popular Science* article titled *Death of a Computer*, electronic components start to fail over time; they become less efficient, which means that they need to be replaced every few years to maintain system proficiency.

Your router should also be password protected, making it more difficult for hackers to gain access to your confidential information. And regarding connectivity: ideally, your server should be hard wired (wired directly) to your router. This allows for optimal data transfer rates, reducing latency or lag time for all other connected computers.

Finally, depending on the EHR or practice management system, a wireless connection to the other pieces of hardware (the client machines in your waiting room and treatment rooms) should be adequate. This allows for easy networking and mobility throughout the office, not to mention that aesthetically it helps to avoid the look of wires between rooms. Utilizing these pieces of hardware for your EHR system will maximize your user experience while at the same time simplifying your networking, and ultimately will help optimize not only the quality of care you're able to offer your patients but also your practice's profitability.

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