Getting the Most from your EHR Investment

An EHR is one of the biggest investments a provider will make, adding up to millions, or even billions, of dollars in software, time, and resources. On average, an EHR can take six months to a year to implement, with stabilization of the system requiring another 6 to 12 months.

While an EHR system can enhance clinical quality, create efficiencies for providers and improve patient satisfaction due to increased ease of access to information, they can also have the opposite effect. They can pose enormous usability challenges, often disrupting the patient-clinician relationship, leading to provider burnout, decreased productivity and quality of care metrics, and decreased patient satisfaction scores leading to a low ROI perception.

Some Common Challenges

Interoperability complexity, template misalignment with practice operations, and inordinate time spent training physicians and staff pose further challenges and delays. These scenarios create widespread dissatisfaction with the solution meant to effectively manage patient care records and provide efficient workflows to reduce time and costs. In the months and years following an EHR implementation, providers realize that the system no longer meets their needs as the healthcare spectrum evolves, imposing changes such as federal regulations, meaningful use, mergers and acquisitions, and the shift to value-based care, that require modifications to the EHR platform. However, memories of the strain caused by the initial implementation often leads providers to resort to a litany of quick fixes and bolt-on technologies that solve immediate problems in lieu of a holistic approach to meaningful usability across the organization.

This is even more true in revenue cycle management. Utilization of bolt-on technologies, such as AR Workflow tools, has become common practice by providers and services vendors as it is considered a quick win. The impact, though, to processes and data inconsistencies can cause bigger challenges.

As more technologies are added, inefficiencies creep into the process due to duplication of work, and the data system becomes more complex and fragmented. Many vendors claim smooth, complete integration into the host system but in most cases, it is more of an interface which ends up creating silos, reducing productivity, and making it difficult to create data insights.

A Single Source of Truth

As organizations continue to be challenged with rising efficiencies and decreasing cost, the need for a single source of truth becomes more critical. This single source of truth provides clearly defined performance and insights that facilitate better, faster decisions in the organization, compared to the lengthy process of compilation, validation and data debate. When bolting on technology, it becomes nearly impossible to serve a single point of data-based truth to the organization.

Why EHR optimization?

EHR optimization seeks to improve clinical outcomes, optimize operations, and enhance user and patient satisfaction. Optimization integrates and leverages EHR capabilities where stakeholders, not the system, drive change and decision making. Workflows can be redesigned with multiple formats, greater flexibility, and requiring less time to complete. Automation functionality may be explored and used to reduce repetitive steps and reduce physician burden.

Beyond workflow efficiencies, proactive data driven optimization capabilities may assist in identifying patients at risk for SDOH and enable utilization of clinical and financial metrics to determine areas for improvement.

EHR optimization should help the organization meet regulatory requirements, increase the ROI for the system, reduce cost for patient care and improve financial health. An optimized system results in timely billing, fewer denials, enhanced patient accessibility and overall improved customer satisfaction.

Remember, EHR implementation is not a static event. Optimization is a process of refining the EHR system to better align with the organization's needs. It is a marathon, not a sprint, and should be approached as an ongoing performance improvement program that requires participation from all stakeholders. By following these steps, you can transform your EHR into a powerful, interoperable tool, not a hindrance or barrier. When done properly, optimization can swing the pendulum from clinician burnout and under performance to well-being and meaningful use and drive cost savings and improved ROI.

5 Steps You Can Take

1. **Identify a team of stakeholders** that are aligned with and actively participate in the transformation of the EHR.

2. **Carefully and thoughtfully identify change**s that are critical and yield the most immediate impact.

3. **Acknowledge the time, effort and cost** of the core EHR and optimize the application before adding technology. The bolt-on could only propagate further inefficiencies.

4. **Find a trusted partner** to help you identify ways to optimize your EHR system.

5. **Seek vendors across your revenue cycle** who can work directly in your system rather than deploying many technologies. It provides real time visibility, reduces error and greatly reduce costs.

For more in-depth information about Revenue Cycle Optimization and all our Revenue Cycle Management solutions, please visit SavistaRCM.com