In June, MGMA-ACMPE released the results of a questionnaire that ranked members’ most pressing practice management challenges. In this edition of “Practice Makes Perfect,” we’ll tackle No. 10 on that list: optimizing an existing EHR.

Think back on when your practice selected an EHR. You saw some demonstrations, you picked the one you liked, signed on the dotted line, trained your staff, set up the interfaces and hit your go-live date. That done, now is certainly not a time to sit back and relax.

One very important step in any EHR implementation happens after your go-live. I highly recommend practices perform an “optimization check.” An optimization check allows practices to compare the way their EHR is currently used, to how the system was intended to be used. This can be done either a few months or a few years after the go-live date. Time spent on the front end can help ease frustrations down the line.

Here are three actions your practice can take to optimize your existing EHR.

**Determine if the pre-implementation goals are being met**

Once your system has been implemented, revisit the pre-implementation goals you set. Did you want better access to information? Better coordination between physicians and other staff? Determine whether your goals have been met, or outline the steps the practice needs to take to meet them.

**Perform a meaningful-use gap analysis**

Does your system have the capacity and capabilities to help you meet meaningful-use requirements? Become familiar with the stage 1 and 2 meaningful-use indicators. Associations such as MGMA-ACMPE can provide tools and resources to guide you in this process and keep you informed of regulatory updates. You don’t have to wait for your vendor to begin addressing key workflow issues. Determine what your staff needs and the type of behavioral changes they might need make as you try to achieve meaningful use with your system.

**Train, train and retain**

One pre-implementation training session with your EHR system might not be enough. Determine if there is staff who could benefit from additional training and what that training needs to include. Make sure you have a formal training process for new employees, as well. Don’t rely on informal dissemination of information among staff, be thoughtful about communicating updates. An EHR is a helpful tool to manage information in your practice, and it requires proper staff training and check-ups to optimize it. The journey can be complicated, but taking the necessary steps to optimize your existing system can go a long way toward streamlining operations and running an efficient practice. Kosiorek will present “Time for an EHR "Optimization Check Up” at the MGMA 2013 Annual Conference, Oct. 6-9, in San Diego. His session will include tips on optimizing an EHR to help lead increased efficiency in physician practices.

Derek Kosiorek
Principal
MGMA Health Care Consulting Group

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