

How to Overcome the Hidden Barrier to Successful Electronic Records Adoption & Meaningful Use

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With new government mandates, and the promise of financial incentives, more and more physicians are feeling the pressure to adopt Electronic Records systems in their practices.

While you have likely heard of the *potential* of these systems to offer real benefits — by reducing your practice costs, increasing the speed of reimbursements, and enhancing your practice's productivity — you also undoubtedly have heard “horror stories” of practices that experienced just the opposite.

Although some practices have made the transition relatively smoothly, others have struggled with implementation delays, productivity slowdowns, unexpected costs, and marginal outcomes.

Clearly there's a big difference between simply *investing* in a system and *gaining real benefits* from the technology.

What Makes the Difference?

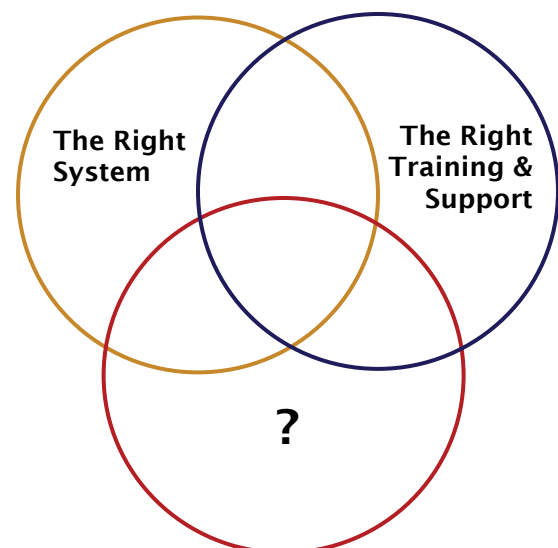
It goes without saying that you need to select the right system for your practice, and you need the right training and support to get the system installed, your patient data transferred, and your EHR up and running.

But if that's all that's needed, then practices buying systems from the same vendor and getting the same level of training from the same implementation teams and consultants should experience the same results, correct?

Unfortunately that frequently isn't the case.

The fact is, there's more to a successful Electronic Records system implementation than simply investing in the right technology. There's more to it than just taking advantage of training programs, consultants, and technical support.

Something else is needed — and the presence or absence of this essential third factor is what frequently makes the difference between practices that reap the full benefits from their systems and practices that don't.



The Hidden Barrier to Successful Implementation

It is now well accepted that a high percentage of system problems, productivity slow-downs, and cost overruns are *not* due to problems with the technology, they are *not* due to deficits of any kind on the parts of vendors, and they are *not* due to inferior support or technical training.

After well over 15 years of investigation into the factors impacting implementation success, researchers in medical informatics have found that when practices run into trouble with their Electronic Records systems — when projects run over time and over budget, when they lead to significant productivity slowdowns, and when they cause problems or errors in the practice — *people* are a big part of the problem!

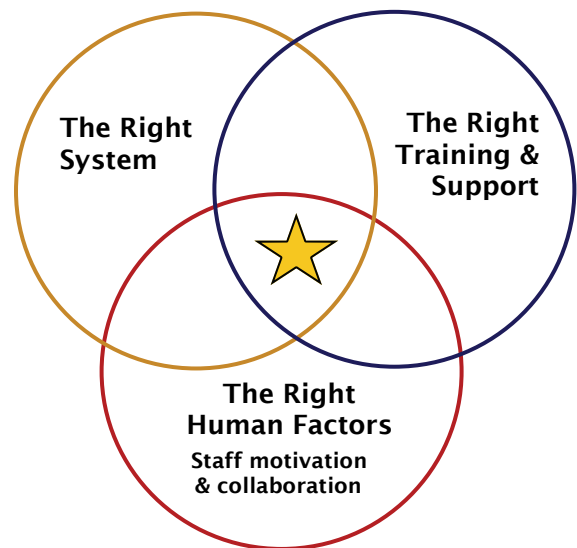
It's not that anyone really *intends* to sabotage the system or get in the way of progress, it's just that for the success of a project as all-encompassing as an Electronic Records implementation, everyone on your staff needs to play an active role in the process, not simply sit back and passively allow implementation teams and outside consultants to "do their jobs."

The Essential Third Element

Medical informatics researchers have identified "human factors" as the essential third element in a successful implementation.

What are these human factors?

- First, everyone in the practice must be genuinely *motivated* to use the technology.
- Second, physicians and staff members alike must *collaborate* — with technical support teams, with consultants, and with each other — in order to get the best possible system configuration for the practice, and in order to redesign practice workflows to get the best possible results from the system.



Lack of staff motivation, collaboration, and participation in the implementation process is a hidden barrier that can *easily* derail the most promising implementation.

The vital importance of staff motivation and collaboration to successful Electronic Records implementation comes as no surprise.

Our combined 35+ years of advising business leaders has taught us that when it comes to leading change in *any* business or professional practice — *if you don't get the people part right, nothing else matters.*

Before a business or organization of any size can effectively implement significant change, leaders must first get everyone in the business *ready* for change.

- First, managers need to get everyone on staff to support the change.
- Second, they need to put the right planning, communication, and feedback systems in place so that everyone can collaborate effectively to make the change successful.

People who have low psychological ownership in a system and who resist its implementation can bring a 'technically best' system to its knees.

-- Dr. Nancy Lorenzi & Dr. Robert Riley
Journal of the American Medical Informatics Association

Your practice manager needs to do the same.

It's a fact that in most practices, everyone on staff is *already* busy enough. If they don't feel a real sense of urgency to make the implementation successful, they won't prioritize and enthusiastically apply themselves to the technical training. They also are not likely to volunteer ideas and suggestions that would nip implementation challenges in the bud.

Even if everyone in your practice recognizes the need for and advantages of a new Electronic Records system, if you don't involve them in planning the implementation strategy, if you don't systematically get their collaboration in adapting practice workflows to benefit from the technology, and if you don't have the right communication systems and feedback mechanisms in place, your practice is more likely to experience productivity slowdowns, your implementation is likely to take longer and cost more, and your new system is not likely to ever deliver its *maximum* benefit.

Overcoming the Barrier

When you and your practice manager follow a systematic approach to building staff buy-in, participation, and collaboration in your Electronic Records implementation you vastly increase your odds of a smooth and successful transition.

You don't have to wait for your implementation to get under way in order to get started on this, in fact, the sooner you and your practice manager begin to involve your entire staff in the planning process, the better.

Steps to Building Staff Buy-In and Collaboration

1. Build a real sense of urgency for Electronic Records adoption in staff members at all levels of your practice. This includes everyone from physician partners and staff providers to your front and back-office personnel.
2. Develop a vision and clear goals for what your new system will do for the practice.
3. Establish a Guiding Team for the project. The team's size and structure will depend on the size and structure of your practice.
4. Actively engage all staff members in the planning process prior to implementation (and prior to system selection, if possible).
5. Involve users in customizing and modifying relevant components of the system. This gives them a feeling of "ownership" of the system and also ensures that you get the best possible system configuration for your practice's needs.
6. Engage physicians and staff early and often in redesigning practice workflows for a smoother implementation and better outcomes.
7. Establish effective communication mechanisms between departments and individuals in your practice. Actions taken in one area of your practice frequently impact other areas. It's important that everyone be kept in the loop.
8. Establish clear feedback mechanisms and mechanisms for rapidly converting feedback into system adjustments or workflow changes. You don't want to let emerging challenges go unaddressed.
9. Engage staff regularly and often in evaluating implementation progress and establishing new functional and practice-wide policies and procedures to speed implementation, enhance outcomes, and implement future change.

While some physicians resign themselves to adopting an Electronic Record system and simply "hope for the best," you now know how to remove a hidden barrier and shift the odds of successful implementation in your favor.

When you and your practice manager follow a systematic approach to building staff buy-in and collaboration you not only reduce the likelihood of cost overruns and productivity slowdowns, you position your practice to realize *real benefits* from your new system, and you accelerate your practice's progress toward meaningful use.

Dr. Jane Adler & Dr. Robert Karlsberg are experts in leading the human side of change. They are authors of ***Realizing the Promise: How to Maximize the Benefits of Electronic Records in Your Practice*** & the ***RTP Implementation Toolkit*** — the first and only self-contained program to systematically guide practitioners and their office managers through the process of rapid and successful EHR adoption.

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