

Electronic Medical Records—Are They for You?

By Eileen M. Murphy, PT, OCS, MTC

Electronic medical record (EMR) software appeared to me to be the wave of the future. As I sat planning my first outpatient orthopedic clinic in Massachusetts, I was intimidated by the thought of learning a potentially difficult method of documentation. After much trepidation, I decided to learn this unfamiliar method. In retrospect, my staff and I are so glad we did.

After careful scrutiny I decided to use ReDoc, software made by the Rehab Documentation Company. Knowing it was endorsed by APTA assisted in my decision making. The sales representative, at that time, was able to walk me through the process and demonstrate the product to me with ease. I knew that with a bit of practice ReDoc's EMR would be an asset to the clinic, especially in this highly managed care state of Massachusetts, where legible documentation is vital when requesting reimbursement and additional visits.

The software is broken down into several parts: initial evaluation, daily intervention, reevaluation, missed treatments, and discharge summary. The initial evaluation is the most time- and labor-intensive part of using ReDoc. Per ReDoc's recommendation, we save valuable time by creating shortcuts in Word-Auto Text. In the narrative portion of the assessment section, we insert a shortcut to propagate a paragraph, which we can customize to the patient within seconds. This report takes approximately ten minutes to write, and with the click of a button a plan of care can be printed for our therapist's signature and sent to our referring doctors.

As the clinician becomes more efficient and skillful, he or she is able to type the majority of the initial evaluation in front of the patient. While the patient is on a modality, the therapist can complete the evaluation and have it printed.

The daily note takes three minutes to write. It documents time in/out, the treatment intervention, and a therapeutic exercise flow sheet, as well as functional subjective information, objective findings, and the most recent assessment.

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The reevaluations are a snap. We use this documentation format when a patient requests that communication be sent back to the doctor without giving the therapist advance notice. We can insert our objective data and summate our objective findings, assessment, and recommendations for the physician. This procedure takes three to five minutes and is invaluable. We no longer have "priority" reports stacked up in transcription, nor transcriptionist salaries to pay. Furthermore, these reevaluations can be submitted to insurance companies for additional visit requests. The reevaluations are very legible and assist with the approval of these visits so we can meet a patient's goals.

The missed treatment note takes us thirty seconds to produce, and the discharge summary five minutes at most. As a result, the discharge summaries are completed

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promptly; they are no longer piled up in a file cabinet awaiting completion.

Some may think it is difficult to persuade staff to embrace the change. I found that if therapists are given enough time to practice, they are more apt to react positively toward this documentation approach. When they can print out a reevaluation within two to three minutes, they understand the benefit.

Another advantage is that we never have to search for a chart. It is very easy to access the patient data. It is also easy to track patient visits, insurance information, and demographics. There is even a reminder that pops up to cue us when the reevaluation is due.

The disadvantages of having EMR are minimal compared to the advantages; however, the equipment and license costs should be considered. Here at Mass Sport & Spine, we have

a server, a printer, and a desktop computer at the front desk. In addition, each therapist has a wireless laptop. (Note that it is not necessary for each therapist at your practice to have an individual laptop.) There are annual licensing fees for Word and Microsoft terminal services per user. Furthermore, on occasion we have had some technical problems, but most are easily remedied by ReDoc's skillful and timely technical department. Technical support is a necessary expense to support the use of the product.

The annual upgrades to the software are fabulous. This documentation company is committed to continually improving the software; it routinely listens to the recommendations of therapists in the field who are using the software on a daily basis. We look forward to the scheduler that is to accompany this product. ■

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