

EHR user satisfaction: Happy docs stick with the little guys

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The big names aren't getting the big numbers in EHR user satisfaction scores according to 2013 data from AmericanEHR and the ONC. EHR vendors with low numbers of attestations for eligible ambulatory providers generally have a higher average satisfaction score than the large corporations we've all come to know such as Centricity, eClinicalWorks, and Epic. Rated on a scale of 1 to 5, relatively low-use products such as ChartMaker, Praxis EMR, and ABELMed scored 3.82 and above, while [Allscripts](#) hovered between 2.9 and 3.2, and Cerner clocked in at 2.94.

EHR satisfaction has been a contentious topic as adoption increases, with usability becoming increasingly important as the EHR Incentive Program requires more and more complex reporting from physicians. [More than a third of physicians](#) in a recent poll said they were very dissatisfied with their EHR, and unhappy providers are [openly and frequently](#) shopping around for new systems. With nearly 6,000 eligible professionals (EPs) attesting to [meaningful use](#) in 2013, sharing several billion dollars between them, vendors need to start working harder to keep their customers – and keep them happy.

Six of the top ten highest scores went to vendors with fewer than 100 attestations this year so far, while five of the ten lowest had more than 200 customers. Companies with several thousand successful meaningful users ranked middling to poor, which could be due to a variety of reasons. A lack of customer support and training is consistently cited as one of the top reasons for user dissatisfaction, and it's possible that large companies with [long representative queues](#) and little time to devote to smaller practices with smaller billings are part of the problem. Indeed, it's small practices that experience the most frustration, with 40% of physicians saying they would refuse to recommend their EHR product to a colleague.

"Training is a significant deficiency," [said](#) Alan Brookstone, MD, chief executive officer of Cientis Technologies during a presentation at HIMSS13 in March. "Training is required at all stages of adoption, both at time of implementation and as more advanced functionalities are required or integrated with EHRs. Almost 50% of respondents in a 2011 AmericanEHR survey reported receiving less than 3 days of training to use their EHRs or no training at all.

In a crowded marketplace filled with startups looking to fill a variety of brand new niches, smaller EHR companies are prone to financial instability or being snapped up in consolidation efforts, and providers need to take long-term sustainability into account when choosing a vendor. It's no surprise that many practices continue to invest their precious resources in veteran companies with proven track records, but there are tradeoffs there, too. Providers should think carefully about their specific needs and long-term goals before committing to a product and the company that backs it. "If these issues are not recognized and addressed, clinicians will do the bare minimum in order to meet meaningful use requirements," Brookstone warns. "The result for the meaningful use program will be an inability to achieve the intended goals of improvements in efficiency, quality of care and clinical outcomes."

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