

Why using a Free EHR can be very expensive

The allure of a “free” EHR can be very strong, but the hidden expense, risk, and liability can be very costly. Software and hardware costs are only part of the expense of deploying a certified EHR. These other expenses need to be considered in the process: (1) training, (2) adaptability of the solution to fit in your practice, (3) role of the EHR with billing and collections, (4) support, (5) continued free use of a certified EHR, and (6) ownership and control of data.

(1) Training on a free EHR is not included. Consultants charge more than \$1,500 a day. The best training is performed over a series of days and weeks as the group needs to use the functionality. A well-crafted training plan takes into account the optimal work flow for your group.

(2) Free solutions have limited functionality and are not adaptable to group and provider work flow. Work flow begins with an appointment calendar that manages patient appointments tied to insurance, superbill, payments, and eligibility checking. Next these “free” EHRs don’t have any ability to streamline creating notes. Without personalize templates, forms, and menus, it takes more time to create your notes. Without diagnosis, prescriptions, vitals, medications, and other information automatically inserting into the patient notes, all this information must be typed in. Integrated speech recognition enables free form text to be added to notes. SuiteMed IMS includes all this functionality at no additional charge. All of these features save valuable time for providers and staff, which reduces costs. Free EHRs have little to not automation or personalization.

(3) The billing and collections process must be part of the EHR process to eliminate double entry. Meaningful use requires the following information be entered in the EHR: patient demographic information, patient visits, and diagnosis and medical codes for quality measures. Entering this information and then entering it into a billing system is redundant entry.

(4) Support is critical to any successful use of an EHR and staying ahead of the changing requirements. Can you reach support on the telephone when you need them? How quickly do they solve problems? Do they add features and functionality that will improve your work flow and save time? Does support guide providers through the Meaningful Use process? SuiteMed IMS provides support, MU guidance, and feature enhancements included in our monthly fee. Premium support is needed by physician groups.

(5) “Free” is often not a profitable business model. While companies like Google have been successful at selling advertising, their customer base is in the millions. There are only 650,000 practicing physicians in the U.S. EHR vendors that raise tens of millions of dollars are likely to be sold in a few years and what happens then to your data or your data that someone else now controls. Some of these “free” companies are reselling consolidated data, which may not be something your patient’s desire and may open your practice to litigation. The bottom line is these “free” companies, may either go out of business or will probably not be “free” in the next few years. Why would any doctor put their practice in jeopardy?

(6) Ownership and control of your patient data is critical to the success of your business and patient care. Would your patients be comfortable knowing you use a “free” system? Can you get your data out of these systems? Who owns the data or has rights to use the data. Extracting your data may not be available from these vendors. This could be a major cost to your business.

Things to think about with Practice Fusion

Practice Fusion is a free web based solution that is supported by ads. They are promoting rapid growth of users but that is easy with free software since many people will download it to check it out. This does not mean that people are actually using it to run their practices. The company has not proven profitable yet so running a practice on this offering would be very risky.

What happens if Practice Fusion gets acquired or no longer can support a free product? In 2001, GE acquired Encounter EHR, shut it down and gave providers 30 days to try and get their data back or lose it. What is the impact to a practice that relies on the solution to run their practice if Practice Fusion goes bust? How would they retrieve their patient data?

Who owns the patient data? While they claim you own the data, you have to pay handsomely to an Indian company to extract your data.

When the doctor is reviewing with the patient their chart and they see an advertisement flash up, the provider may find themselves having to explain. The patient may feel the doctor is selling their information to save a buck.

Are they selling information and advertisement around patient information? Since they’re powered by Google the program is targeting ads and companies based on the patients’ health information. What about the patient’s privacy?

Recently Google has also been cited in a number of privacy lawsuits. Most patients would feel very uncomfortable going to a doctor that is using a service like this. Certainly a doctor using the free EMR doesn’t have to tell their patients that their system was paid for by advertisers. However, could you imagine the backlash if the patients found out. Do doctors really want to risk their revenue?

Please contact us for additional information and a quick demo of SuiteMed IMS an Integrated EHR Solution.

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