

Considerations in Choosing an E-Prescribing System

Every practice will have to evaluate their unique needs to determine what approach to e-prescribing will work for them. There is no one approach that will be right for all practices. Here are some issues to consider in choosing an e-prescribing approach.

EMR system or stand-alone? Stand-alone e-prescribing applications are cheaper and easier to install than a full-blown EMR system. However, stand-alone applications may not have all of the functionality you will find in an e-prescribing module that is linked to an EMR. Stand-alone applications may require double entry of some clinical data – causing additional work, slowing you down, and risking additional errors. If you are considering an EMR at the moment, this may be an additional factor in favor of moving forward now.

Locally installed or web service? An application is locally installed if you get it on a CD-ROM or download it from the internet and run it on your own computer. All of the data about your patients and their prescriptions are stored on your computer. When you use a web service, you use a web browser program, like Internet Explorer, to log into a web site where the application runs. With a web service, all of your patient and prescription data is stored on the web server. If you subscribe to an e-prescribing web service, you pay less up-front, you have nothing to install or maintain, and you don't have to worry about connecting your e-prescribing application to other services such as an e-prescribing network. There are drawbacks to the web service approach, of course, such as possible lack of availability due to network problems, and concerns regarding storing your clinical data in somebody else's system.

Hand-held or PC-based front end? If you do not have a PC handy in every location where you might want to write a prescription, you might consider using a hand-held PDA to enter prescriptions. You will give up some functionality, ease of use, and speed for this convenience. Some applications may support both handheld and PC interfaces, but not all do.

Fully qualified system? In order to qualify for the Medicare e-prescribing incentive, the system you use must meet certain requirements. CMS has published a complex list of functionalities and interoperability standards that qualifying systems must support. Not all e-prescribing systems in the market today will meet all of the specifications. Make sure that you get **written assurance** from your likely supplier that your chosen system will meet all current CMS requirements. CMS has stated that the e-prescribing functions found in all EMR systems that meet the requirements of the Certification Commission for Health Information Technology (CCHIT) since 2008 will qualify. . The following two websites provide e-prescribing system search tools to help in the e-prescribing system selection process: Surescripts Prescriber Software Search Tool at www.surescripts.com/connect-to-surescripts/prescriber-software.aspx and the American Medical Association's "Find a System" tool at <https://eprescribing.ama-assn.org/ePrescribing/sysfinder/step1.do>. Once you have determined two to three systems

you are interested in, you will have to contact the system vendor to verify that its system is qualified under the CMS e-prescribing program.

Free or almost free systems? Do some research to determine if your state, major health plan, or local hospital has an incentive program for e-prescribing. Some states and health plans offer free e-prescribing software. Some hospitals offer e-prescribing that connects to hospital systems for data exchange. These systems can be offered by hospitals for as little as 15% of the actual cost. If a free or cheap system is available, make sure that it is a system you can be happy with. The National ePrescribing Patient Safety Initiative, available at www.nationalerx.com, offers a free, basic e-prescribing system that meets the CMS e-prescribing qualifications for all interested physicians and medication prescribers.