

## 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 and some resources that offer further information.

**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 be qualified. 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 2008 requirements of the Certification Commission for Health Information Technology (CCHIT) will qualify. CCHIT plans to certify stand-alone e-prescribing systems in 2009. In the meantime, SureScripts-RxHub maintains a list of the e-prescribing system capabilities of most vendors and certifies the ability of the system to work within their vast pharmacy network. Their website serves as a good starting point to locate e-prescribing systems that may be “qualified” under the incentive—further written assurance from the vendor will be necessary.

- Detailed CMS E-prescribing Incentive system requirements:  
<http://www.cms.hhs.gov/PQRI/Downloads/E-PrescribingMeasureSpecifications.pdf>
- CCHIT certified EMR systems:  
<http://www.cchit.org/choose/ambulatory/08/index.asp>
- SureScripts-RxHub certified e-prescribing systems:  
<http://www.surescripts.com/certification-status.html>



**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, no matter what it costs.

### Sources of good information to get started on e-prescribing:

#### ACP Guides

- [Electronic Prescribing: What You Should Know](#) 
- [E-prescribing order hits unprepared internists](#)  
by Ryan DuBosar, writer for ACP Internist
- [E-Prescribing: What Is It? Why Should I Do It? What's in the Future?](#)   
by Daniel Z. Sands, FACP, IM2008 PP

#### Links to External Sites

- [HiMSS – Health Information and Management Systems Society](#) offers tools and resources related to e-prescribing
  - [Electronic Prescribing for the Medical Practice: Everything You Wanted to Know but Were Afraid to Ask](#)  
by Patricia L. Hale, FACP, editor (Used by permission.)
- [Get RxConnected](#) – Several provider organizations, including ACP, have come together to offer this Electronic Prescribing Readiness Assessment
- [eHealth Initiative](#) - This organization, whose mission is to improve healthcare using technology, offers some practical resources on eRx.
  - [Clinician's Guide to E-Prescribing](#)
  - [Electronic Prescribing: Becoming Mainstream Practice](#) 
  - [A Consumer's Guide to e-Prescribing](#) 
- [CMS](#) – CMS rules and conferences relating to e-prescribing
  - [E-Prescribing Incentive Program](#)