



White Paper

Identifying Criteria for Successful Emergency Department Information System (EDIS) Selection & Implementation

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Usability cannot be underestimated in selecting an EDIS.

Making the Right Choice

All EDIS vendors work within the same paradigm based on the idea that market demands and regulatory bodies will drive features and functionality. If at their core every EDIS offers the same basic features and functionality, the differences among the available options will likely drive end users to make the best EDIS decision for their facility. This white paper will highlight those factors — usability, standardized content, domain expertise, expectation management, corporate stability and the ever-present bottom line. These key differentiators are the foundation of the decision making process for implementation of an EDIS. They become primary factors in the successful or failed leap to leverage available technology with the goal of improving the emergency department experience for participants at every level of patient care.

Will Our Staff Use It?

Software vendors frequently tout EDIS elements such as interfaces, integration and administrative reporting. While they are certainly all features of a successful EDIS, they have the potential to be non-factors when part of an application is cumbersome to use. If clinical users find it difficult or time consuming to enter data, they will typically not enter the information properly, work around it, or simply not use the application at all. At best, any of these scenarios will skew data used for management reporting. At worst, all the resources dedicated to the purchase and installation of the EDIS will have been wasted.

Usability cannot be underestimated in selecting an EDIS. In fact, some EDIS vendors commonly refer to this formula for software selection: (usability x functionality = success). This makes sense, but it is time to challenge this equation due to the everincreasing pressure of seeing patients safely and efficiently in frequently understaffed and overcrowded emergency departments. Perhaps one could argue a more useful formula for EMR/EDIS selection is:

Usability³ x Functionality = clinical, administrative and financial success

After all, the core competency of the emergency department is safe, efficient and professional patient care. Usability means easier incorporation with the workflow of the fast-paced ED, allowing clinicians to more closely focus on those core competencies. An EDIS your staff is comfortable using becomes an asset in patient care with the potential to enhance the ED experience at all levels; it should not be a hindrance that is avoided, worked-around or ignored.

Format and Content: Who, What, How?

In researching the various EDIS solutions available facilities quickly realize how important well-formatted and exhaustively tested content is to the success or failure of their choice. Don't hesitate to ask the questions, "Who developed your content? Is the content clinically appropriate and presented in an intuitive layout? How was it tested?" Favorable answers to these inquiries will impact clinician workflow, compliance, data integrity as well as overall confidence in the decision to move forward with the transition to an EDIS.

Flexibility is key to making the right decision where content is concerned.

Completely Configurable vs. Ready to Use

“Completely configurable” is a term many vendors use to describe their systems. Translation: Your facility should be prepared to configure its own EDIS and invest significant resources in time and money to develop a system you thought you were paying a vendor to provide. Certainly, no one would argue that EDIS implementation doesn’t require a commitment of some resources to be successful. However, content should be “configurable” only to the extent the facility wants it to be. Flexibility is key to making the right decision where content is concerned. A facility should be confident in the quality of their EDIS content and comfortable with the options offered for configuration and customization. The right solution provides clients with a fully developed EDIS plus the flexibility to make it their own without requiring hundreds of employee hours for “configuration.”

What’s your experience in this field?

Interest in computerizing the emergency department has risen rapidly in recent years due in part to the ever-increasing pressure facilities feel to see more patients with fewer resources. Some companies in the market seek to leverage this interest into a quick sale, developing rather generic, one-size-fits-all products to tack onto a larger hospital information system (HIS) they offer. Any successful EDIS should be compatible with that HIS. Consider whether the EDIS they offer will really suit the needs of your facility’s ED. It is essential to acknowledge that the unique, fast-paced workflow of the ED requires a solution tailored to it, while being compatible with the HIS. The best solution should come from a vendor with many years of experience specific to the implementation, management and support of successful ED information management tools.

Such a vendor should understand the multi-factorial nature of domain issues that can impact the success of an EDIS, and ideally provide the client access to a multidisciplinary team focused on optimizing processes prior to implementing the technology. The team should also offer a wide range of services, including examination of a site’s current documentation compliance, nurse staffing ratios, patients per hour by physicians, admission rate, average length of stay, boarding time of admitted patients, the saturation level of the ED, as well as the impact of IT and administrative leadership. Another function of the team should be to provide documentation education to the clinical, coding and billing staff, and to offer assistance with the establishment of new policies and procedures during the transition from a paper to an electronic medical record. Further, clients should expect a thorough assessment of patient and information flow followed by recommendations based on clinical, deployment and documentation expertise.

This type of in-depth consultation prior to implementation establishes a clear picture for clients of exactly how EDIS technology will help them identify and reach their goals for workflow efficiency and EMR quality and reliability.

After implementation the assessment of acceptance, compliance, information flow and reimbursement should continue as part of the vendor’s commitment to providing high quality client service during the entire implementation process. The best EDIS vendors understand that their success is based on their clients’ success.

Mutual success should be a priority with the goal of creating a partnership.

An experienced, financially stable EDIS vendor is able to offer a wide range of pricing options.

Expectations

A company's ability to manage expectations is another key factor in a facility's decision to implement an EDIS. More experienced vendors can offer an in-depth understanding of the technology's ability to solve many ED problems. However, a proven vendor should acknowledge that there are some issues an EDIS cannot solve. For example, technology will not reduce over-crowding, increase staff, create inpatient beds, make consultants return calls or put a neurosurgeon on staff. Identifying which areas the EDIS will positively impact is key. Therefore, EDIS product specialists should be trained to focus on issues specific to each facility from the first presentation through implementation and beyond. Mutual success should be a priority with the goal of creating a partnership to identify issues that correlate with the vendor's solution set in order to make a positive impact.

Can we count on you?

It's important to know that your chosen EDIS vendor is stable and reliable. Questions to ask in this area include, "How are you financed? What is your history?" For example, a company solely reliant on venture capital, or for which the EDIS market is one of many pursuits, might not be the best choice. Additionally, take into consideration ongoing reliability issues such as technical support (is it available 24/7/365?), product uptime (is it reported at least 99%?) and customer relationships (are they a priority post-implementation and is a user group conference available?). A hospital should feel confident in the reputation, stability and commitment of the firm to ensure a successful EDIS implementation.

What's the bottom line?

There is no question that a facility deciding to implement an EDIS will invest significant resources in making the goal a reality. Once the decision is made to move forward the question then becomes, "How can we make this happen?" Ideally the vendor sufficiently understands and appreciates the constraints of the facility's resources in order to tailor pricing models to them. An experienced, financially stable EDIS vendor is able to offer a wide range of pricing options such as upfront pricing and subscription-based pricing, which doesn't require a large capital expenditure for the software. In addition, facilities should be aware that some EDIS vendors require their clients to sign long-term service agreements, offering their software at a very low price and charging for all the services required to make the EDIS functional. Between implementation, configuration and process documentation, facilities can rapidly accrue charges in the millions.

Facilities should also expect to receive a well-defined scope of work document early in the implementation process. Experienced, reliable vendors will happily provide this documentation because it allows clients to establish timelines and budget resources efficiently without worrying about unplanned expenditures.

Success

While the road to choosing an EDIS can be challenging at times, take a moment to clearly examine the differences among your choices. If you consider the essential criteria for EDIS selection, then the best solution should be evident through its distinctions. By navigating the process with the right EDIS provider, you can achieve the goals you set at the beginning of your journey.

For questions regarding Identifying criteria for successful EDIS selection and implementation please contact:

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