



Health Information Technology (HIT) Step-By-Step Action Plan

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama encourages Medical Home practices to utilize e-prescribing and electronic medical record (EMR) technology. Utilization of these technologies is also necessary for practices to achieve National Committee of Quality Assurance (NCQA) Physician Practice Connections®-Patient-Centered Medical Home™ (PPC-PCMH) Level III status. Below is a Health Information Technology (HIT) step-by-step action plan for both electronic health record (EHR) and e-prescribing implementation, including resources for interested practices. By following each step and using best practices to implement HIT, you are positioning yourself and your staff to succeed.

Step 1: Health Information Technology Funding

Before choosing and implementing your e-prescribing or electronic medical record system, it is a good idea to educate yourself on the funding that may be available for using HIT. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) authorized \$17 billion for Medicare and Medicaid incentive payments to eligible professionals who are meaningful electronic health record (EHR) users. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) will begin making incentive payments in January 2011. The Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act of 2008 (MIPPA) authorized a separate incentive program for eligible professionals who are successful electronic prescribers. The program began January 1, 2009. The links below provide useful guidelines on how to qualify for incentive reimbursement and also highlight important questions to consider before choosing a system:

- [**ARRA**](#)
- [**MIPPA**](#)
- [**Medicare's Practical Guide to the E-prescribing Incentive Program**](#)

Step 2: Practice Assessment

This is probably the most important step in implementing a new system within a practice. Make sure to do everything you can to get it right the first time. If you don't, you may get halfway through the next few steps and realize you have to go back and start over again, which is time consuming and could be very expensive. Part of the practice assessment is to decide between two types of systems: e-prescribing only (a "stand-alone" system), or an EHR that includes e-prescribing functionality. During this step, you should also analyze your workflow, clarify your needs in a system, determine technical readiness, assess your hardware needs, and examine the practice's commitment to HIT adoption. Several good articles are listed below, but please be sure to put [**Best Practices in EMR Implementation: A Systematic Review**](#) at the top of your reading list.

- [**A Clinician's Guide to Electronic Prescribing**](#)
- [**EHR Preparation Guide \(AAFP\)**](#)
- [**Getting Started with an EMR \(HIMSS\)**](#)
- [**Readiness Assessment: Is your practice ready for electronic medical records?**](#)
- [**Self-Assessment \(AMA\)**](#)

Step 3: Selecting a Vendor

It is easy to become overwhelmed during this step of the process because of the large number of vendors to choose from. In Step 2, you decided on the type of system (EHR or e-prescribing) that is best for your practice. Don't let a talented salesperson sell you a system that you don't need. All EHR and e-prescribing systems work perfectly during a demonstration; it's when they are introduced into your workflow that problems can occur. Be sure to review the Certification Commission for Health Information Technology (CCHIT) and Surescripts® certified vendor listings to shorten the list of potential systems to consider. Listed below are some additional resources to help you select a vendor.

- **CCHIT Certified Vendors**
- **EHR Vendor Selection Guide (AAFP)**
- **HIMSS-Selecting the Right EMR Vendor**
- **Overview of CCHIT's 2011 Certification Programs**
- **Surescripts Certified Vendors (e-prescribing)**
- **Ten Best Practices for Selecting EMR Software**

Step 4: Implementation

At this point, you have decided on the HIT solution for your office and you are ready to begin implementation. A strong recommendation during this phase would be to get the training needed to use the software you have chosen. You have made a big investment in technology, so make sure you have the tools to help you use it successfully. Training is not an area of the budget that you want cut back on. On-site training for the EHR or e-prescribing software is highly recommended. Another recommendation that helps guarantee a successful implementation is to designate "Super Users" within your office. Super Users are members of your staff (e.g., office manager, doctor, IT manager, etc.) who receive extra training and can be available to answer questions at a moment's notice during clinic hours. Super Users are extremely helpful when a doctor in the exam room experiences problems with the new system. The alternative—calling your software vendor's technical support line while the patient waits—just won't work for most physicians. Availability of a trained Super User provides an effective mechanism to resolve any questions about your new system in a timely manner. The links below offer additional information to aid in HIT implementation.

- **EHR Implementation Guide (AAFP)**
- **EHR Implementation in Ambulatory Care (HIMSS)**
- **Methods for EMR Success**

You may contact a Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama representative if you have questions by calling 205-220-5917 or e-mailing medhome@bcbsal.org.