

Epic to Open Its EHR System to Customers for App Development



IT giant Epic Systems (WI, USA) is set to launch an app store that will allow third-party companies to develop products in tandem with the vendor's EHR system, which is the most commonly used across hospitals and physician practices.

The *Wisconsin State Journal* reports that the app store was announced by Mark Bakken, co-founder and former CEO of Nordic Consulting, which will be working with Epic customers on applications, at the Wisconsin Innovation Network on 17 February. The app store will launch in a few weeks and, as Bakken noted, it will "open the floodgates" for all sorts of companies to develop and market their apps, especially those in the Madison area filled with former Epic employees.

Epic spokesman Shawn Kiesau confirmed the plans but could not provide any further immediate details. The effort will be officially known as the App Exchange, Kiesau said.

"We think Epic is big now. This will cement their long-term legacy. It's exactly the right thing to do," Bakken told the newspaper. He expects the first apps to come from Epic's customers, so that one healthcare organisation can offer other hospitals and clinics the specialised programs it has developed to work along with Epic's software. "Let's say you want to create an app for the iPhone. Apple has automated that online. As long as you play by all the rules, they'll publish it," Bakken added.

News of Epic's app plans comes shortly after a Chilmark report noted that EHR vendors had shown little in the way of mobile innovation that could contribute to enhanced patient engagement, though it did note there were exceptions. Epic would appear to be one of them in light of this development.

At a minimum, the App Exchange could allay criticisms that Epic is too-closed of a system and too difficult to share EMRs between one another. Moreover, interoperability could prove crucial as the U.S. Defense Department considers which team should receive a contract worth up to \$11 billion over five years to install an electronic health records system for the U.S. military. Epic and IBM have submitted a joint application for that contract, which is expected to be awarded later this year.

Uses for apps on Epic's EHR system are myriad for both providers and consumers, Bakken said in the State Journal report.

"Once they officially launch this, then it'll be very, very easy. It will really open the floodgates for anyone that knows Epic to really get their product on the market quickly and in front of Epic's customers. So the distribution channel is huge," he said.

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