

Managing outsourced IT systems smoothly



Large medical institutions often employ the latest IT systems to help manage key areas of operations (i.e., medical, administrative, financial, and lab/research services). In-house IT staff are usually available to ensure the systems or networks are running smoothly.

In contrast, many small practices don't have their own IT pros or specialists who can be relied upon quickly when an IT emergency strikes. As shown in the Medical Economics 2017 EHR Report, many small and solo practices outsource their IT services.

An action plan is needed for dealing with any IT emergency, which often results in losses of time and money. There are steps smaller practices can take to be proactive to ensure when the time comes, they are prepared, according to Joe Capko, senior consultant and partner of San Francisco-based consulting firm Capko & Morgan.

Have a point person

Even if a medical practice outsources its IT services, it needs a person inside who knows the ins and outs of the systems, Capko says. The practice should find someone who can develop procedures and work with technology vendors. This is the person who will not only put together the practice's action plan, but ensure everyone knows about it.

Get vendor guidance

Technology vendors, from electronic health records (EHRs) to billing and collections, have experience in dealing with outages and answering related questions. Have the point person get in contact to gather the adequate information of what to do for a short-term or long-term emergency.

Reach out to peers

Many software applications, including EHRs, have user groups online or in the same state as the practice. Seek answers from those using the same systems and who might have had experiences with outages before.

Don't settle for an 800 number

When an emergency occurs, practices don't want to spend time trying to reach a call centre. Get multiple contacts and multiple numbers for assistance.

Be redundant

Back up everything. That includes the practice's emergency IT point person, who should have a stand-in who also knows the ins and outs — or simply just the location — of a plan. Explore backups to the practice's internet connectivity just in case. A practice won't be able to access its cloud-based record without a stable connection. It's a good idea to store physical copies of vital data somewhere safe, perhaps away from the practice's physical location.

Revisit emergency plans

At least twice a year, have the practice point person revisit the plan, ensure contact names and numbers are still accurate, and update if needed. It's also a good time for practices to review the plan in a setting like a staff meeting, so everyone knows what's expected of them when the time comes, Capko says.

Source: [Medical Economics](#)

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