Gaps In Successful EHR Implementations:

The Challenges & Successes Of Providers In The Marketplace

CREDIBLE
Behavioral Health Software

Contents

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I. Introduction

While there is consensus among behavioral health providers that implementation of an electronic health record (EHR) system brings value, there are multiple challenges to assuring that an EHR implementation will be successful and will result in the operational and strategic impacts expected.

During a recent national survey of behavioral health providers, it was found that a majority of behavioral health organizations have already implemented an EHR system, but the level of success varies from one organization to another. Organizations reported considerable variance in EHR implementation timelines, with the majority reporting 6-12 months to fully implement and over 10% reporting implementations of 2 years or longer. The study also looked at factors influencing implementation delays, which provided some interesting insights into the challenges that can occur during implementation.

Potential Challenges To A Successful EHR System Implementation

- Lack of involvement from executive leadership
- Minimal staff engagement
- Poor planning and project management
- Failure to identify and fully implement the key components of the EHR system
- Selecting the wrong EHR vendor and system needed by the organization

So how do we define a successful EHR implementation, and how do we ensure we make it happen? The good news is, when organizations select the right EHR vendor partner and take the necessary steps for successful implementation, challenges can be avoided and organizations can gain all the advantages of a complete EHR system.

II. Findings From The Field

A 2016 survey of behavioral health organizations was conducted to study their experiences in implementing an EHR system. This survey identified areas where typical EHR implementations fall short and the greatest challenges organizations face during their EHR implementation process. Key findings from this survey include the following:

- 80% of the providers surveyed have purchased an EHR
- 69% of providers with an EHR define their EHR as fully implemented, with most having implemented their system in 6-12 months
- 25% of those with incomplete implementation attribute the delay due to the EHR vendor, and 30% report that it was a combination of delays from the vendor and their own organization.

In most cases, when implementation was not fully complete, the scheduling and billing modules were the major functionalities reported as being fully implemented with the clinical and reporting modules incomplete.

Chart 1: Your Organization's EHR System Is...

Not yet implemented 6%
Partially implemented 25%
Fully implemented 69%

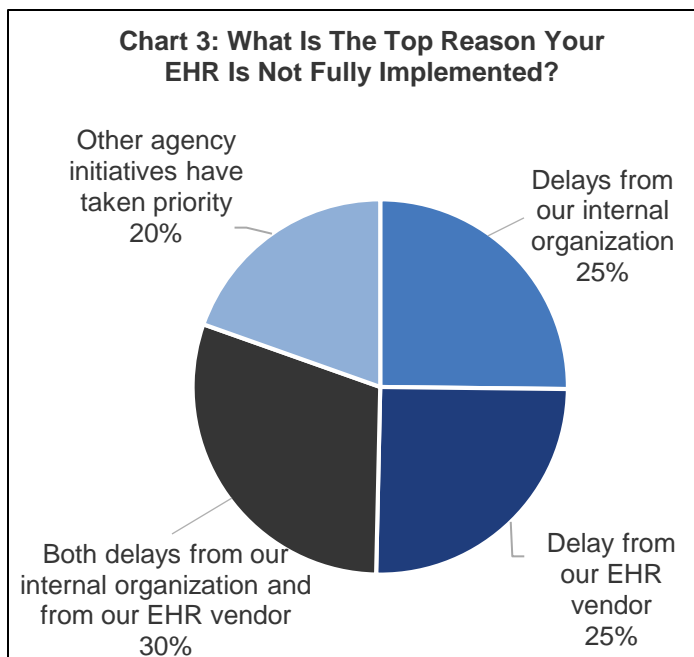## Overall EHR Implementation & Timeline

According to the survey, 80% of behavioral health organizations have purchased an EHR system already. Of those who have not purchased an EHR, 63% give the reasons as either that EHR systems are seen as too expensive or not needed. Clearly, most providers see the value and importance of an EHR system, but the implementation itself is a large and often daunting task, requiring the right staff expertise, the right level of staff resources, an experienced EHR vendor, and a clear understanding of implementation goals across the organization.

Chart 2: How Long Did It Take To Fully Implement The EHR (From Contract Execution To Go Live)?

24+ months, 12%
18-24 months, 7%
12-18 months, 19%
0-6 months, 27%
6-12 months, 35%

In terms of implementation timelines, there is considerable variance (See Chart 2). Twenty-seven percent (27%) of providers report implementing their EHR system in six months or less, with the largest group (35%) implementing in 6-12 months. (Keep in mind when looking at the data that respondents are describing based on their own definitions of the implementation completion and whether or not they consider the EHR to be "fully implemented." The data about core functionality that follows illustrates a slightly different picture.) Of particular note is that more than one out of ten providers (12%) reported implementations of two years or longer.
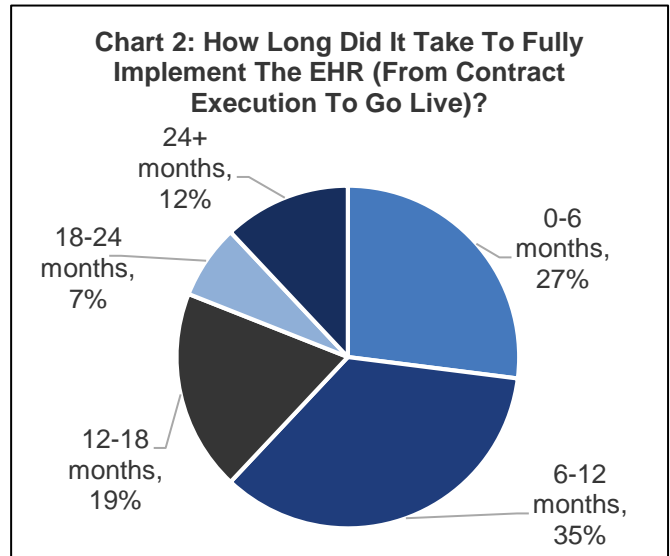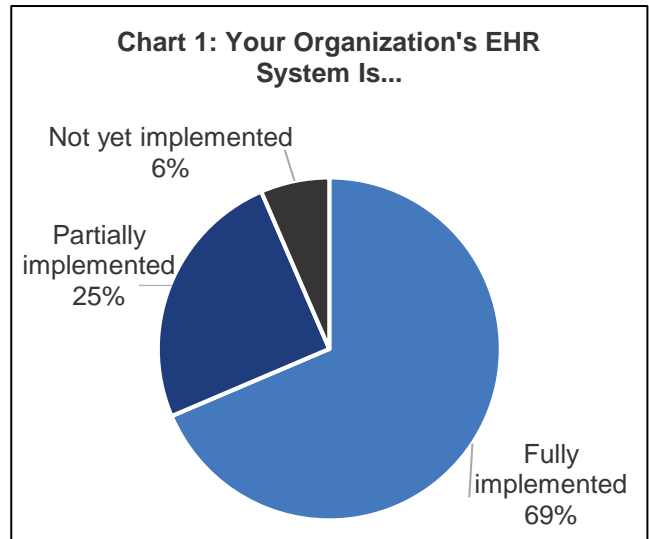
EHR Implementation Delay Factors

The data regarding the reasons for EHR implementation delays provides some interesting insights into the challenges that can occur (See Chart 3). Twenty-five percent (25%) of providers report the delays as being due to the EHR vendor, with another 25% attributing it to their own internal challenges. Additionally one out of five providers reported that the delay was due to other agency initiatives taking priority over the EHR implementation project itself. (One wonders if this latter group of providers also had longer implementation timelines.) The fact that more than half of providers attribute the delays partially or fully due to problems on the EHR vendor side highlights the need to choose the right EHR vendor partner, and the importance of thorough research of EHR vendors' experience and success in doing implementations.

Chart 3: What Is The Top Reason Your EHR Is Not Fully Implemented?

Other agency initiatives have taken priority 20%
Delays from our internal organization 25%
Delay from our EHR vendor 25%
Both delays from our internal organization and from our EHR vendor 30%

Core Functionalities Not Fully Implemented

In the survey, the four core functionalities of an EHR system were defined as clinical, scheduling, billing, and reporting — all of which are necessary to remain competitive in the changing health and human services landscape. Yet, only 31% of providers indicated that all four of the critical areas of functionality were fully implemented (See Chart 4). Note that this finding differs from the one above where 69% reported that their EHR system was fully functional. This is clearly due to differing definitions of what a fully implemented EHR system really means. Scheduling and billing functionality have been prioritized or more successfully implemented by providers, while the critical functionality of management reporting is only reported as fully functional in just over one out of five providers. More than a quarter of providers reported that one or more of these core functional areas is planned for implementation, but not completed yet.
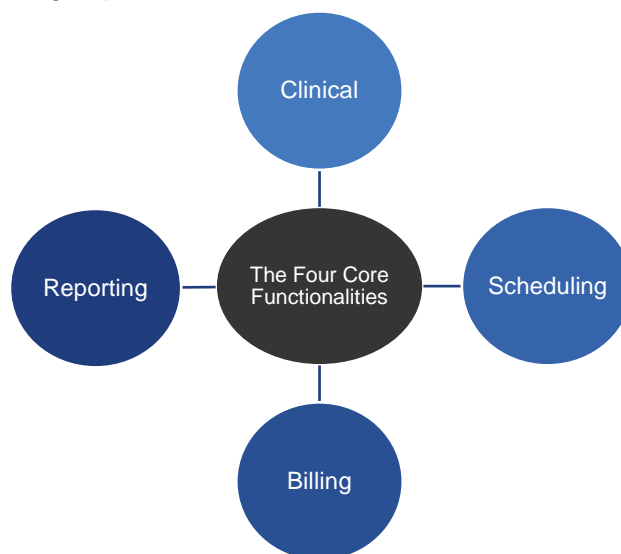
The Four Core Functionalities: Clinical, Scheduling, Billing, Reporting

Chart 4: Core EHR Functionality Implemented	Fully Implemented	Partially Implemented	Planned, but not implemented	Not planned, but wanted
Clinical	32%	**41%**	25%	2%
Scheduling	**37%**	25%	31%	7%
Billing	**34%**	29%	31%	6%
Reporting	21%	**48%**	26%	5%

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# III. Seven Steps To Effective EHR Implementation

Most service provider organizations recognize the importance of the EHR, but it is clear from the data that there are a number of lessons to be learned. EHR implementation timelines can vary considerably, and defining a successful implementation requires a focus on core functionality and desired features. While providers' delays in a successful EHR implementation are common, ensuring that you select a vendor who has a track record in successful, on-time implementations is just as important as picking the right EHR product. To avoid the widespread failures and shortcomings when it comes to EHR implementation, there are seven key steps to ensure effective results.

1. • Identify the objectives of implementing an EHR & selecting the right vendor

2. • Establish a steering committee and well-rounded implementation team

3. • Assess the organization's current operations, workflow, and clinical documentation

4. • Complete system installation, configuration, and thorough testing

5. • Develop training materials and conduct staff training

6. • System go-live

7. • Evaluate system performance and leverage the EHR's capabilities over time

1. Identify The Objectives Of Implementing An EHR & Selecting The Right Vendor

When beginning an implementation, organizations should identify their goals and objectives for the implementation. As part of this phase of the implementation, organizations should define key objectives that answer questions such as, "What are we looking to improve with an EHR system? How do we hope the EHR system will affect our bottom line? What efficiencies do we hope to achieve with implementation of an EHR system?" When you identify what your organization's objectives are in implementing the EHR system, it will help you stay in line to reach your goals. How do you ensure you are getting both the right product and an experienced EHR vendor?

2. Establish A Steering Committee & Well-Rounded Implementation Team

While the executive team must be accountable for the implementation process, champions should be identified in each department to ensure the implementation goes smoothly. These champions will help increase commitment at all staff levels which is crucial to the success of the EHR system. A steering committee made up of staff from all departments and staff levels with a strong focus on project management will keep the project on track and keep others motivated to see it through to completion.
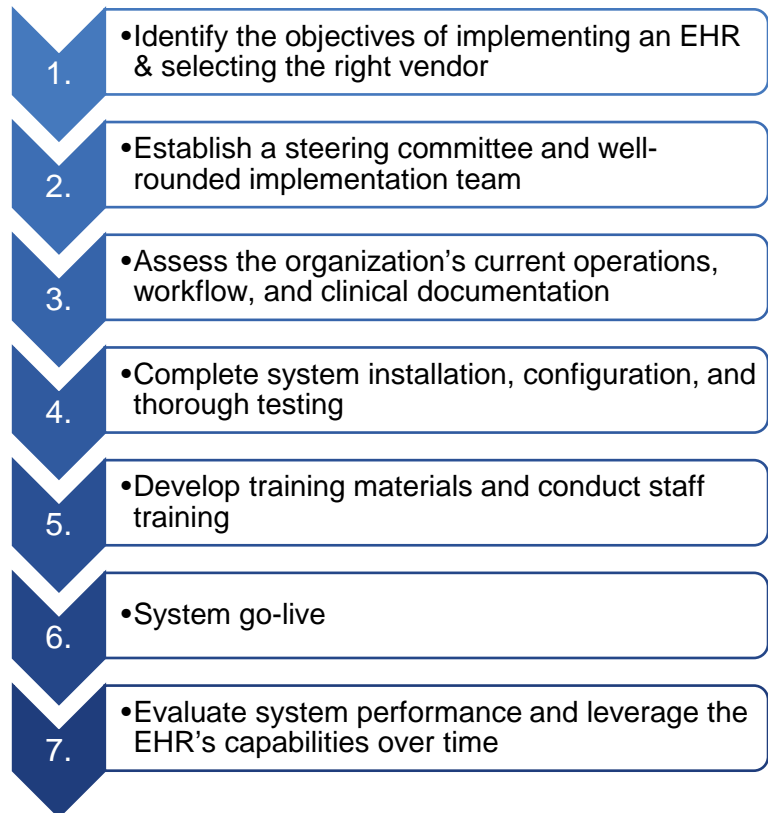
3. Assess The Organization's Current Operations, Workflow, & Clinical Documentation

The organization must conduct an assessment of each of its current organizational operations, workflows, and clinical documentation, analyzing each workflow from start to finish. The EHR system will not be effective if it's built based on old or incorrect organizational workflows. Instead, workflows needs to reflect current and future needs for documentation, billing, and reporting.

4. Complete System Installation, Configuration, & Thorough Testing

For this step, partnership and a support culture with the right vendor is crucial. A vendor who is supportive through the installation, configuration, and testing of the EHR system is invaluable to the organization. It is possible for alerts or other key features to be missing prior to the go-live date, so this is the time to work out the bugs to ensure a smooth technical transition.

5. Develop Training Materials & Conduct Staff Training

An effective EHR system will have intuitive features to make training a rather painless process. Staff training materials that are easy to follow should be developed and readily available to all staff members. Staff members will have varying levels of technical proficiency, so any necessary training to develop basic skills and enhance comfort with technology will make it an easier transition for all staff involved. Organizations should also be sure that there are support options available to staff and that they are aware of those support options to assist with questions and issues encountered throughout and after the implementation. The proper training and support for staff is not only necessary but is a great way to avoid resistance during implementation.

6. System Go-Live

The EHR system go-live is a crucial step in ensuring the EHR system is a success. During go-live, organizations should remain aware of any issues that occur or any alerts or items that are missing from the system so these can be promptly handled and fixed. While this may seem like the final step in the implementation process, organizations must not let implementation stop here.

> **Your implementation doesn't end at system go-live!**

7. Evaluate System Performance & Leverage The EHR's Capabilities Over Time

After the EHR system go-live, there is a continued need for an on-going, responsive relationship with the EHR vendor. There should continue to be an interdepartmental team to address issues and assure that the EHR system is adapted to address new services, workflows, and organizational needs. As the industry and organizations evolve, EHR systems have become increasingly flexible and configurable to accommodate changes needed due to updated regulations and shifting internal operations.

Following these key steps creates a smoother EHR implementation process for organizations, which will help maximize their EHRs strategic capabilities. A fully implemented EHR system that utilizes the four core functionalities of clinical, scheduling, billing, and reporting will set the organization up for success in future growth and sustainability during times of change.

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IV. Conclusion

Implementing a new EHR can be daunting for most organizations, but identifying the challenges and following the steps for a successful EHR implementation can help organizations recognize their objectives and reach their goals with few bumps in the road. Because most behavioral health organizations realize an EHRs value, the need is to now assure that these systems create the greatest strategic impact possible for the organizations implementing them. A strong commitment from executive management, along with a competent and interdepartmental project management team and an experienced EHR vendor will help to secure staff motivation and engagement throughout the process.

With the survey data showing that almost one-third of behavioral health organizations with an EHR have not reached full implementation (and even fewer report having fully implemented the four areas of core functionality), leaders need to stay focused on closing the gaps and understanding the challenges. Organizations that can do this will be the ones to obtain the greatest strategic impact through a successful and fully implemented EHR system.

Additional Information

For additional information on EHR selection and implementation, please review the following articles:

1. Naughton-Travers, J., Tauro, A., & Toscano, N. (2015, Oct. 27). How To Take Your Ideal EHR From Plan To Reality: Software Selection & Implementation. Retrieved from https://11042-presscdn-0-63-pagely.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/indres/102715tiiehrselect.pdf
2. Oss, M. (2015, May 30). Getting Your Clinical Team On Board With Technology. Retrieved from https://www.openminds.com/market-intelligence/executive-briefings/getting-your-clinical-team-on-board-with-technology/
3. *OPEN MINDS*. (2015, May 28). The 'Faux Live' EHR. Retrieved from https://www.openminds.com/market-intelligence/executive-briefings/faux-live-ehr/