

# How To Succeed at Implementing EMRs in Small Primary Care Physicians' Offices

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**Introduction:** Successful implementation of a fully functional electronic medical record (EMR) into community primary Care Physician (PCP) offices is unusual. The COMPETE project has successfully implemented EMRs networked to our research centre for 23 docs at 15 sites in the Hamilton-Wentworth community. A similar process will be used until recruitment reaches 40 physicians. Our process involves a research team and separate hardware, software and practice management vendors.

**Method:** Extensive planning and mock-up in our project computer laboratory led to a business cycle implementation approach. All vendors agreed to test the approach in 5 pilot site offices. With minor modifications, an implementation template was then completed and used for the "full roll-out" phase of implementation.

**Results:** Our implementation process involves a highly structured, packed 5 week cycle, and four main groups of staff – research implementation team, hardware integration team, software application and support, and practice management. The process proceeds as follows:

1. Office assessment to outline hardware requirements and configuration. This includes a discussion with office personnel describing the plan, event dates and strategies to minimize disruption of the office during installation. Practice Management review of the office is necessary to assess work flows. Technical site review checks cabling setups for computer drops.
2. Computer hardware is ordered well in advanced of the installation date. Extensive EMR training for both physicians and staff is completed a short time before equipment install for better retention purposes. A "practice" computer in the office may also help.
3. Each office is cabled, including exam rooms and high volume work areas.
4. All computers are set up and tested on installation day. When equipment is up and running, backup procedures are taught, help line use is encouraged and an installation sign-off is completed. This marks the official hand-over of the office to the support team which includes ongoing case management.

**Discussion:** EMRs can be successfully implemented in a 5-week cycle in a primary care office if done with attention to organization, motivation of users, extensive training and concentrated support from all partners.