



Pediatrician Wellness

EHRs contributing to physician burnout; what you can do to reduce frustration

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When physicians are asked for their thoughts about how to reduce burnout, improvements to the electronic health record (EHR) rise to the top.

Many of the challenges physicians experience in using an EHR are tied to factors beyond the control of any one person.

"Change is necessary at the system level in order to truly address the things in EHRs which contribute to burnout. However, there are some strategies individuals can employ to more efficiently use their EHR in its current state," said Emily C. Webber, M.D., FAMIA, FAAP, chair of the AAP Council on Clinical Information Technology (COCIT) Executive Committee.

What can you do right now?

COCIT knows that many AAP members are "feeling the burn" right now, so it is sharing the following tips to help pediatricians reduce their frustration with the EHR.

Invest in personalization. Most EHR systems have ways to personalize the user experience. One example is using text extenders/expanders. A short sequence of letters or a word can be used to auto-produce a longer string of text (sentences, paragraphs, even whole notes). Personal text extenders can be especially helpful for documentation that has a lot of redundancy between patients (e.g., a treatment plan for a common condition).

Cultivate local expertise. If there is a clinician or staff member who is EHR-savvy, consider giving this person time to expand his or her EHR work for the practice. The person could:

- provide support while staff is using the EHR, e.g. in the exam room,
- develop practice-level personalizations,
- interact with the internal technology group or vendor to report concerns and learn about new functionalities, and
- share EHR tips during practice meetings.

Get more training. Just as continuing medical education is necessary to keep abreast of advances in pediatric care, ongoing training and education are necessary to effectively and efficiently use the EHR, now an important



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tool in caring for patients. Larger health care systems may have in-house training teams. Smaller practices can ask their EHR vendor for information and training. Some vendors offer conferences or groups where users can share and learn from each other.

Consider alternatives. Physicians who are struggling might consider limiting direct interactions with the EHR by using scribes or voice recognition software. Many clinicians have found scribes to be affordable and of great assistance in documenting and finding information in real time. Others prefer to speak rather than type and use voice recognition to save time. Both can be worth any initial investment if they free up more time to interact with patients or reduce the need to chart after hours.

Protocols/workflow shifts. Daily routines may benefit from a protocol that either can be automated or completed by support staff. For instance, EHRs can improve the quality of care by alerting physicians to things they may not have known about before EHRs, such as patients receiving care outside the practice. With the aid of a protocol, support staff rather than physicians could handle much of this follow-up.

Beyond tips and tricks

Federal agencies, EHR vendors, medical societies and health care organizations are working to address systems-level challenges. In recent years, federal legislation and rules have been established to improve health information exchange, reduce burdensome administrative tasks and develop functionalities essential to pediatric health care. A few examples of system-level challenges include:

- increased documentation burden in EHRs related to local and national regulatory and reporting requirements,
- poor usability,
- lack of true interoperability,
- limited functionality to support patient confidentiality and
- billing requirements that have not evolved as the use of EHRs has become ubiquitous in recordkeeping and the provision of health care.

"Burnout is definitely multifaceted, and the areas that can be influenced by optimizing the EHR are incredibly important," Dr. Webber said. "In many ways, curating and removing unnecessary tasks is as important as adding new and innovative steps."

The AAP is committed to providing members with tools to support them in providing the best quality pediatric health care. COCIT will continue to advocate and develop resources to help reduce EHR-related frustration and burnout.

Dr. O'Donnell is a member of the COCIT Executive Committee.

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