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How to Choose the Right Medical Practice Software



Medical practice software is used to streamline the everyday tasks of operating medical facilities like physician practices, nursing homes, and hospitals. Sometimes referred to as **medical management software** or **medical office software**, it can be used for access to patient billing information, appointments, insurance claims, and for reporting.



Good medical practice management software improves efficiency from the front desk to inventory storage.

Medical practice software should not be confused with **electronic medical records (EMR) software**. EMR software is concerned with automating and digitizing patient records such as medical histories, allergies, prescriptions, immunization, and other personal medical information. Medical management software is, however, sometimes bundled with EMR software so that the two types of software are easier to integrate.

The ultimate reason medical practices use medical office software is to cut down on the time physicians and nurses spend filling out paperwork, so that they have more time to deliver medical care to patients.

Cloud vs. Onsite Medical Practice Software

Cloud computing, also known as Software as a Service (SaaS), is revolutionizing many types of business software, and medical practice software is no exception. Today's medical practices can choose between cloud-hosted software and on-site medical practice software. In some cases, using cloud-hosted software is preferable, due to lower costs and no requirement to have a dedicated server on-site, along with the maintenance tasks that go along with having an on-site server.

With on-site medical practice software, a criminal act or natural disaster can destroy a server and the information contained on it, so a robust backup and disaster readiness plan is critically important. With cloud-based solutions, the provider takes care of these concerns by maintaining servers, performing regular back-ups, and having a disaster readiness plan.

Larger facilities, such as teaching hospitals or other large hospitals, may prefer to run their medical management software on-site, and they often have the IT resources and space to be able to do so successfully.



Starting a new medical practice? Great software can get you off to a promising start.

Top Features of Medical Practice Software

Medical practice software generally includes some subset of the following capabilities:

Appointment Scheduling

Rather than using a spreadsheet or a paper appointment book, many of today's medical practices use medical practice software that allows better organization of patient appointments. Appointment scheduling features include logging new patients, tracking physician schedules, tracking appointment histories for individual patients, and sending automated appointment reminders.

Claims Management

Medical office software can be used to edit patient data to meet insurance claim standards, saving many hours of administrative time. Some software allows electronic claims submission, tracking of claims in real time, and verifying benefit information. Many practices choose HIPAA-compliant software pre-approved by insurance providers for an even more streamlined claims process.

Inventory Management

The right software can assist with stocking, distributing, and ordering of inventory, and cut down on manual data entry. Some programs track inventory orders, check supply levels, and manage storage of inventory. They can also easily generate inventory reports.

Patient Billing

Some medical practice software solutions prepare billing statements, send electronic bills, and even collect and process payments. In some cases, employee payroll is included in the software capabilities.

Patient Registration

With some software packages, administrators can enter data and transfer it seamlessly to the practice's EMR system.

Document management

Medical practices generate plenty of paperwork, but medical practice software can cut down on it. Software is available that can scan prescriptions and bill payments and allow managers to create comprehensive practice tracking reports.



You can save substantial amounts of time if your software handles automatic insurance claim submission.

Which Type of Software Is Right For Your Medical Practice?

Some medical practices have very specific needs, and their medical practice software solutions should be designed to meet those needs. While some software packages are designed to mesh with many different types of specialty practices, some specialty practices may want to choose software that meets needs specific to their practice.

Family Medicine

Family medicine practices are almost always busy and cater to patients of all ages with a wide range of reasons for visits. With a family medicine clinic, it is critical to choose medical practice software with a robust, easy-to-use scheduling system. Because family practices tend to generate high volumes of paperwork, these practices should look for software that allows patient information to be stored electronically. Software that is HIPAA-approved by insurers and allows electronic insurance claim submission can further streamline operations. A good invoicing system can add much-needed efficiency to bill collecting and save time on administrative and collection processes.

Emergency Medicine

Emergency departments have very specific workflows, and their medical practice software must accommodate these. Medical practice software for emergency medicine should include features like integration with EKG hardware, an interface linking emergency medical responders to necessary records, tracking of patient care for those admitted to hospital, and forms for triage protocols. If an emergency department handles cardiology patients, software should include special alerts specific to cardiac patients.

OB/GYN

Software for OB/GYN practices should be able to track every pregnancy stage so that practitioners can instantly review the progress of the mother and baby. It should be able to automatically calculate charges after birth, and should incorporate extras like easy attachment of notes to patient files, to make charting more efficient. Tracking and reminders for routine gynecologic care helps patients maintain consistency of care by automating the reminder process.



With excellent medical office software, you can spend more time with patients and less with paperwork.

Pediatrics

Medical management software for pediatric practices should help with accounts receivable for improving collection rates, billing and coding specific to pediatric practices, and reporting and tools that help back-office staff keep track of claim status and pending accounts. The goal should be efficient, streamlined administrative processes so that practitioners can devote more time to pediatric patients.

Psychiatry

Medical office software for mental health providers must have a great interface for scheduling, insurance billing, and patient billing. It should allow for electronic insurance claims as well as the processing of credit card payments, and should have tools for easy customized reporting. With less time spent on paperwork, mental health providers can find more time for seeing patients.

The following table gives a snapshot of health care utilization in the U.S. in 2010. It is easy to see why medical office software is needed to maximize practice efficiency.

Figure	Significance
3%	Percentage of adults in 2010 who considered the ER their primary source of medical care
12%	Percentage of adults who report having fair or poor health
27%	Percentage of adults who report having good health
61%	Percentage of adults who report having very good or excellent health
82%	Percentage of adult population who had contact with a healthcare

	provider in 2010
83%	Percentage of adults who have a doctor's office, clinic, or other health center as their primary source of medical care
92.1%	Percentage of children under 18 who had contact with a healthcare provider in 2010
344.1	Average number of healthcare visits per 100 people in 2010
1.0 billion	Number of visits to physician offices in the U.S. in 2010
1.3 billion	Number of visits to all ambulatory care facilities in the U.S. in 2010 (physician offices, outpatient facilities, and emergency departments)

Sources: http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr_10/sr10_252.pdf
<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/docvisit.htm>

10 Questions to Ask Before Buying Medical Practice Software

To avoid making an unwise and expensive mistake, it's important that you ask plenty of questions before purchasing medical practice management software. No doubt you'll have your own questions too, but here are 10 must-ask questions for potential software providers.

1. What hardware do I need?

With cloud-based software this is less of an issue, but your employees will still be interfacing with the software from office computers and you want to be sure your office hardware is up to the task. For on-site solutions, you need to know what specs your server will have to meet as well.

2. Does this software support mobile devices?

Many medical practices are turning to mobile devices like iPads to streamline the recording of information about patients and about practice inventory. Even if your practice does not use mobile devices, it is worth finding out about support for them. You may find that a couple of years down the road you want to incorporate mobile devices into your practice, and you don't want to have to start over with new practice management software.

3. What training do you offer?

While medical practice software should have user-friendly interfaces, you need for your employees to be adequately trained, as quickly as possible. Will the company train on-site? Do they offer web-based training? How quickly can your employees become fluent in using the new software?



Find out how software providers train new users before buying.

4. How is existing data imported?

Whether you need to import data that's currently on paper or that's in spreadsheets or other electronic formats, you need to find out what is required to import the information into the new system.

5. Will we need to purchase extra data storage space?

This is a question you should ask whether you're choosing an on-site system or a cloud-hosted system. With on-site software, you need to find out how much storage a practice the size of yours needs. With cloud-based systems, you may be charged for exceeding data limits, so you need to know your data storage options up front.

6. What kind of tech support do you offer?

Most providers offer free technical support for a limited period after the software is purchased. After that time, however, you want to know what you'll have to do to get technical support. When reading software reviews, pay special attention to how well users like tech support services. It can be a deal-breaker if tech support falls short.

7. Does this software integrate with our ERM software?

Some medical practice software is bundled with ERM software because it integrates easily. However, if you purchase practice management software separately and plan to integrate it with your ERM software, it is critical that you find out how well the two software packages mesh together.

8. Can the software handle the demands of my medical specialty?

If you run an OB/GYN practice, or an emergency department, you may have different features in mind for your medical practice software. The same is true for many specialties. When you read software reviews, look for reviews written by users with the same specialty as yours to get an idea of how well it meets the needs of specialty practices.



Specialist practices may require practice-specific features in their medical office software.

9. What kind of security and confidentiality protection does the software use?

As a medical provider, attention to patient confidentiality is paramount. Additionally, you want protection against malware and hackers, or those who would otherwise steal sensitive information, including information about your practice's finances. Don't settle for anything less than total reassurance that security requirements will be met.

10. Does the software integrate with other back-office software?

If your practice management software integrates with software for payroll or human resources, you may be able to improve practice efficiency even more. This may not be a deal-breaker, but it is something you should consider.

Are you considering medical practice software to improve the efficiency and accuracy of your medical practice? Check out [Business.com's resources for medical office software](#) for tips, links to vendors, and further help on making your decision.

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