How to Communicate Your EMR Implementation with Staff and Patients

A guide for healthcare communicators leading the transition from paper-based medical records to EMRs
Executive Summary

Your healthcare organization has finally decided to move from paper-based records to electronic medical records (EMRs). This is great news. EMRs can create lasting benefits, from efficient, coordinated care to improved patient advocacy.

But as you probably suspect, an EMR implementation is a massive transformative change for your staff and patients. And it falls on your shoulders to sell it, not just communicate it.

You can expect the vendor to provide EMR training and help set implementation milestones. What you won’t get, however, is a handbook on communications best-practices for transitioning from paper to EMRs.

The challenges of communicating such a major effort will require you to manage several issues, including:

**Impact on multiple audiences:** You need to keep almost everyone in the loop, from executives who want constant updates, physicians who don’t have time to provide feedback on the EMR, and patients who need to learn a new system.

**Staff fears:** You need to understand how the new EMR will affect workflows and people’s jobs.

**Resources:** You’ve got to balance this initiative on top of other projects. If you have a limited staff, you may need to outsource some of the work to an agency.

The good news is that, while this isn’t a handbook per se, you now have a white paper that offers plenty of tips and tricks to help you successfully communicate your EMR implementation with staff and patients.

### The Benefits of EMRs

**Efficient, coordinated care:** Clinicians’ access to medical records across departments saves time, provides transparency

**Patient advocacy:** Patients access their own medical information online

**Timely updates:** Medical charts are updated in real time
For example, you’ll learn:

→ Four things you must do before you start communicating the EMR implementation

→ The best ways to encourage staff to share their fears with you, which will help you craft effective communications

→ Nine insider tips on how to communicate the EMR implementation to staff and patients

You’ll discover that communicating your healthcare organization’s new EMR isn’t so very different from any other large communications initiative. You’ll also find that it offers you and your team opportunities to demonstrate the critical role you play in any successful change management effort.

And the implementation itself may well be the catalyst your organization needs to change the culture, if that’s on the radar for your executive team.

COMMUNICATIONS PLAN GOALS

Your communications plan must accomplish several goals. It must:

· Demonstrate the need for and the rationale behind the EHR implementation

· Allay fears

· Encourage and facilitate participation

· Create and maintain enthusiasm for the project

· Anticipate and/or avert obstacles

Source: Chad A. Eckes, Communication Management’s Role In EHR Success, Healthcare IT News
4 Things You Must Do Before Communicating an EMR Implementation

Whether or not you were involved in the vendor selection process, you and your communications team face a steep learning curve in the world of EMRs. The more you understand the software, how it works, and its impact on your organization, the better your communications solutions will be.

Here are four actions you can do to take a deep dive and come up to speed — fast.

1. Get on the EMR Implementation Committee

EMRs are software applications, so IT will be an important member of your organization’s EMR implementation committee. But IT is not operating in isolation. Other department heads, from operations and the medical records department to HR and administration, will serve on the committee. And so should you!

To give you an idea on why having a seat at the table is so important, take a look at the personnel who usually attend these meetings:

• Chief Information Officer
• Chief Medical Information Officer (most likely a physician)
• Director of Nursing
• Clinical Applications Supervisor
• Project Sponsors, most likely a physician and an RN
• Project Director
• Project Manager and Applications Analysts
• VP of Communications or Communications Manager (that’s you!)
The benefits to participating on the EMR implementation committee cannot be overstated:

→ **You stay ahead of the game:** As a committee member, you’ll gain valuable insight into the impact of moving from paper-based records to EMRs as well as the timeline and who will be affected. Knowing what’s coming down the pike means you can be proactive rather than reactive in your communications.

→ **You provide input to the team.** A seat at the table means having influence. You’re in charge of the communications plan, and you can help other members figure out who needs to know what and when, and how best to reach the audience.

After all, you’re the expert at communicating and selecting the best communications tools for the message. As a member of the EMR implementation committee, you can deflect directives, such as “just put it in the newsletter” or “send it out in an email blast.” Instead, you can offer solutions that will have the greatest impact on the audience.

→ **You learn how the EMR tool works.** It’s always easier to describe something if you’ve used it yourself. Hands-on experience with the tool is essential to understanding how it will impact the workforce at large.

→ **You can suggest creating a mission statement.** If it’s very early in the EMR implementation process, you can assist the planning committee in identifying project goals.

For example, the planning team at St. Luke’s Hospital in Maumee, Ohio, came up with these four goals for the organization’s EMR implementation:

1. **Excellence**  
2. **Communication**  
3. **Uniting Services**  
4. **Integration**
Whether it’s simple goals or a mission statement, it will allow the planning committee and the entire health system to see the larger picture, even when everyone’s grappling with all the details of the implementation.

It also helps the committee stay on track and gives your department a framework for future communications.

2  Forge Relationships with Other Departments

Your participation as a member of the EMR implementation team will help you develop important relationships with other departments. But you should also reach out to departments outside of committee meetings or departments that aren’t part of the committee at all.

There are two reasons it makes sense to do this.

- **Gather information.** The more you know how this implementation is perceived and how it affects others in your organization, the better prepared you’ll be in your communications.

- **Create allies and sounding boards.** It’s likely that you and other department heads have never before collaborated so closely on something this critical and far-reaching in its impact. You’re all going to need each other as the implementation begins.

For example, as you create communications for the roll-out, you’ll have questions about its effect on everything from patient care to patient accounts. It’s always easier to get help from colleagues when you’ve already established a good rapport with them.

The first step in forging a relationship is simple. Call or email another director or VP to discuss the EMR implementation over coffee. Request 30 minutes of their time, and tell them you’re there to learn, so that you can create EMR communications that work for their audience.
They’ll appreciate that you asked, and the good will you’re creating will help when you have a favor to ask.

3 Talk to Healthcare Organizations that Have Implemented the Vendor’s EMR

It doesn’t matter how good a vendor’s case studies or testimonials are. There’s nothing like talking directly with teams who have transitioned from paper to EMRs and lived to tell the tale.

The best candidates are healthcare organizations who have experience with an EMR implementation in the last year or two. Also, see if you can talk to front-line staff and even patients that have moved from paper records to EMRs. The information you glean from them will be much more helpful than simply reaching out to the healthcare organization’s communications team.

As you talk to these folks, ask them about the benefits, internal successes and patient experience. You’re looking for challenges and wins that will help you craft the right communications, using the right tools for the audience.

4 Fortify Your Resources

As you’ve already surmised, an EMR communications initiative is a huge effort. The average EMR implementation can take up to one-and-a-half to two years. Therefore, depending on the size of your staff, you may need to re-allocate certain team members so that they focus solely on this effort.

You may also need to hire an agency or consultants to assist. For example, at the time of its first EMR implementation, MidMichigan Health had six medical centers, 80 outpatient clinics, 7,000 employees — and one internal communicator dedicated to the project. They have many dedicated people on their communications team, but only one assigned full-time to this project. The team opted
to hire an agency to backfill areas only where the communications team didn’t have expertise or bandwidth.

“We had talented, experienced communicators on our team, but we used an agency to develop a big idea that would make the campaign fun and engaging,” said Megan Yezak, MidMichigan marketing manager.

The big idea — **One Patient, One Record** — was a space-themed communications campaign that had three phases: Kickoff and Mission Prep, Mission Control, and Liftoff. The agency also supported MidMichigan with creative, including videos, motion graphics, and a journey map.

MidMichigan deliberately handled all other communications tasks in-house. “Most health systems use a third-party integrator to configure and implement their EMR. This drives up costs and develops expertise outside, rather than inside, the organization. We decided to build our own spaceship, so to speak, so that it will be operationally easier for us to own it and maintain it going forward,” Yezak said. “It was important to make sure that most of the work happened internally, including the communications.”

That proved a wise decision. When MidMichigan added two more hospitals to its health system, it went through two more EMR implementations, in addition to ongoing upgrades and optimization.

**It’s a Long Journey Ahead**

Like every other healthcare communications initiative you’ve managed, this one will take serious, long-term strategic planning and smart execution.

The deeper you dive now into the nuts and bolts of the software and its impact on your organization, the better prepared
you'll be to communicate what is a positive outcome for your healthcare organization.

Create Effective EMR Communications by Listening to Staff Fears

When the announcement goes out about your healthcare organization switching from paper-based records to EMRs, it will spur immediate reactions from staff. The most likely questions they'll ask are:

“How will this affect my job?”
“How will this affect patients?”

Both are valid questions, and they’re often fueled by fear.

For example, physicians may be worried their elderly patients won’t know how to navigate a new online system to make appointments. Staff who help check in patients may think their jobs will be replaced by kiosks. Critical care nurses may wonder if learning a new system will slow down patient care.

Fear is natural, but it’s also useful in helping you create effective EMR communications for a number of audiences. I’ve found that simply getting people to talk about what they’re afraid of opens up all sorts of opportunities for you and your team.

If you want to get the staff to open up and tell you about their EMR implementation fears, I have these following tips to share:
Choose the Right Setting for Discussing the EMR Implementation

This may sound touchy-feely, but if you want people to be comfortable talking about what scares them, then it’s important to establish an environment that puts them at ease. This can include:

**One-on-one conversations:** These are along the same lines as the face-to-face meetings you’re setting up with different department heads as part of your deep dive into EMRs. Meet the staff member for coffee and have an informal discussion.

**Focus groups:** You might decide to organize focus groups within departments or across departments. Either way, these are a great way to guide discussions with a small group.

**Questionnaires:** This can be formal, like an online questionnaire. Or it can be informal, such as asking managers to hand out a sheet with a list of questions to their staff. Sometimes people feel more at ease answering on paper or online rather than talking in person.

**Step-by-step “kits”:** MidMichigan Health created kits to help managers facilitate conversations with staff. Read more about this on page 18.

Ask the Right Questions about the EMR Implementation

Whether you’re asking the questions in person or via questionnaire, the types of questions you pose are important.

You want to get to the heart of their fears about the EMR implementation, and to hear solutions, too. You also want staff to share openly instead of putting them on the defensive.
The following are some questions that will get people talking about fear:

• What would put you at ease when learning how to use the EMR?
• Who would you like to receive training from?
• How would you like to learn how to use the EMR?
• What habits do you think you’ll have to change when the EMR goes live?
• What would you like to ask other medical staff who have implemented an EMR?
• What is it about switching from paper to EMRs that keeps you up at night?
• Software can be challenging to learn. When you think about learning this new system, what do you envision?

Their answers will reveal their fears, but they’ll also provide a treasure trove of information. For example, you may discover the following:

• Some groups prefer self-paced online training rather than in-person training.
• They’re concerned the EMR will impact patient care, such as scheduling, wait times, time with the doctor, etc.
• They may be afraid of new technology.
• They have a perfectly good process in place and now they have to change it.

Along with their concerns, you may also find out that different groups are excited about the new technology and understand the benefits.

This is all news you can use.
3 Formulate EMR Communications Based on Their Answers

An EMR roll-out is not all roses and sunshine, and it’s OK to acknowledge that in your communications. But once you know what people are afraid of, you can craft communications that deal specifically with their concerns and alleviate those worries as well.

Here are some suggestions:

FOR THE C-SUITE

FEAR: The C-Suite wants to know what you’re doing to communicate the EMR implementation. There is intense pressure on leadership to get the EMR implementation right, because it’s a costly endeavor, and it requires departments to work well together.

COMMUNICATION: You can offer an outline or a matrix of all the communications you have planned for the EMR implementation. As you build and share the plan, you’ll get additional feedback and buy-in along the way. You can also schedule weekly check-ins with the C-Suite to provide updates.

FOR FRONT-LINE STAFF AND CLINICIANS

Here are a couple of worries you might hear about in your discussions with staff:

FEAR #1: Learning the system will be hard and impact patient interactions.

COMMUNICATION: Provide quick-tips cards they can refer to when using the software.

· Publish an FAQs page on your intranet about the EMR.
· Offer a one-sheet for managers to go over during staff huddles.
Offer scripts the staff can practice ahead of time, (e.g., interacting with patients at check-in or on the phone). For example, instead of saying, “I’m sorry this computer is taking so long,” MidMichigan Health trained staff to say “Thank you for your patience while we learn the new system. This system is going to help us take better care of you.”

FEAR #2: The EMR will put me out of work.

COMMUNICATION: When it comes to talking about layoff concerns, acknowledge those fears but also point out the positive that an EMR brings.

Create a journey map to show employees the stages of change they’ll experience during the EMR implementation, so it’s clear what the outcome will be.

A journey map may go only so far. If the EMR roll-out means your vendor will install check-in kiosks, for example, emphasize that this will eliminate long lines for check-in and ultimately free up time for more important tasks, such as accompanying patients to examining rooms, improving outreach and scheduling, or assisting with population health management.

Some roles may be affected, however. At MidMichigan Health, the new EMR reduced the need for transcriptionists. Communications with those employees were transparent in how their roles would change and what areas needed comparable skill sets so that they could be redeployed within the organization.

What You’ll Learn from the Fear

As you talk to employees, you’ll not only get the inside scoop on their processes and how the EMR implementation will likely impact them, but you’ll also hear their ideas on how to improve workflows, especially if you guide the conversations.
You’ll discover there’s an added bonus to these discussions about fear. The information you gather from staff can help the C-suite improve the culture of your organization, if that’s something they’ve expressed interest in.

At the very least, it can help you and HR build a case for culture change to present to executives.
An EMR implementation isn’t just an IT project. It will transform staff workflows and roles, ultimately changing the way your organization carries out all sorts of business processes, from patient check-ins to records-keeping.

This will become abundantly clear during your conversations with staff. You’ll uncover their processes and hear suggestions about how things might run more efficiently at your healthcare organization.

Some organizations, however, take the bull by the horns. They realize that transitioning from paper to an EMR — or from one EMR to another — is an opportunity to change the culture, and they strategically plan for it.

**MIDMICHIGAN HEALTH: ONE PERSON, ONE RECORD**

MidMichigan Health, which has 80 outpatient clinics and more than 7,000 employees, knew that its own EMR implementation was much bigger than a software project.

The MidMichigan CEO and executive team recognized early on that the implementation was an opportunity to focus on the patient experience by improving patient care while reducing costs.

“One of our core values is Our Patients Are the Focus of Everything We Do, so it became a guiding principle for EMR design and configuration as well,” said Megan Yezak, marketing manager for MidMichigan Health. “Yet it can be hard to keep the patients’ needs top of mind when they aren’t in the room during decision-making.”

It’s a major culture change for providers to give patients real-time, transparent access to test results and doctors’ notes or let them
schedule their own appointments, she said. It requires providers and staff to give up significant control, so they were understandably nervous.

“We drew upon our existing patient-family advisory councils to validate what functionality they wanted in our patient portal and whether the proposed design was friendly and easy to use, as well as to vet patient-facing processes such as registration or discharge instructions. We then went back to those councils after launch to share what we’d built and to get more feedback for future upgrades.”

Another successful change management strategy for MidMichigan was to model its decisions on best practices from other organizations that had already weathered these changes with positive outcomes.

“Whenever we got stuck on a thorny workflow or configuration decision, we’d turn to our vendor reps in the room, or to our physician champions who had experienced the product at other facilities,” Yezak said. “We’d ask, ‘How have other health systems handled this and how did it work out for them?’ Those real-life examples helped our providers and staff overcome their nervousness and embrace the changes.”

Your organization may take the same approach as MidMichigan — or not. But it’s important to note that as you learn what employees are scared of, you’ll discover the underpinnings of culture change.

This is valuable information you can share with the C-Suite, especially if executives are considering a culture change initiative down the road. It will also give your team a jump start when you’re asked to support it.
9 Insider Tips on How to Communicate Your EMR Implementation to Staff

You’ve talked to department heads, frontline staff and patients about your healthcare organization’s EMR implementation.

You’ve listened to their fears, and you’ve got a good idea on what you need to communicate, such as EMR training schedules and launch dates for staff and patients.

So the next question is, how will you communicate this information?

I’m sure you’re familiar with well-known internal and external communications tactics, from email blasts and newsletters to intranet microsites and posters.

So let’s take a look at nine different approaches I’ve observed or learned about that healthcare organizations use to share information with folks who need it and boost morale at the same time.

1. Create an EMR Communications Roadmap or Matrix

ANYTIME YOU’RE WORKING ON A BIG COMMUNICATIONS CAMPAIGNS, YOU MUST BE PREPARED TO SHOW OR SHARE A ROADMAP WITH THE REST OF THE TEAM.

An EMR implementation fits this situation perfectly. However, you don’t have to create anything fancy or purchase a new tool or application. An Excel spreadsheet works just fine to show dates, communications deliverables, and audiences.
Department heads, the EMR implementation committee, and the C-suite will all have access to it, preferably on a shared drive, so they can comment or provide feedback.

You’ll create this matrix based on meetings and conversations with department heads and staff, so you’ll have a good idea of what channels work best for them.

For example, your EMR communications roadmap might include draft, approval, and launch or publication dates of:

- Emails you plan to send to physician or nurses about upcoming EMR training
- Intranet pages about the EMR
- Posters for coffee stations and hallways
- Internal training videos
- Table tents for the cafeteria
- Patient messaging on hospital lobby flat screens

The matrix shows everyone involved in the EMR implementation what you’ve got planned and that you’re keeping things on track. Its function is not only to inform but to calm people’s nerves and demonstrate that you’ve got this. It instills their confidence in your team.

### 2 Publish a Scorecard or EMR Implementation Milestones

You can accomplish two important things when you create a scorecard or publish milestones:

- You show the progress the organization is making towards a very big goal
- You boost morale by indicating you’re all in this together.
For example, you might focus on EMR training, with the scorecard showing the following:

- Training dates
- Percentage of departments that have completed the training

Primarily an internal communications tactic, a scorecard or milestone marker reinforces the EMR implementation process so employees can see progress and understand that they’re not alone in this initiative.

And you can make it fun so it’s engaging. Share photos of teams that complete the training, with captions such as “Test #1 is done. 99 more to go!” Track progress in the form of a thermometer on your homepage or a colorful chart.

Scorecards or milestones also serve to highlight accomplishments in other departments that aren’t on the front lines. Show what IT is accomplishing, or finance or the medical records department.

**Don’t forget next steps…**

A good rule of thumb with every milestone announcement is to tell your audience what’s next. They’re not living and breathing the details of the EMR implementation like you are. Always tell them what’s coming up. It will reassure them and keep some of their questions at bay.

3 **Provide Step-by-Step “Kits” to Facilitate Communications**

MidMichigan Health designed special kits to help managers and physicians lead their staff through interactive discussions.
The kits included a:

• Facilitator’s guide
• Collection of Fun, inspiring video
• Journey map to help visualize the changes ahead

For managers who were already adept communicators, the kits served as a guide.

But for those who were less confident communicators, the kits laid out a step-by-step plan for how much time to allot, how to use the video and other materials, and what questions to ask in order to generate group dialogue and engagement, rather than just giving a one-way presentation.

And the communications team didn’t just hand out kits. They brought all 300 of their top leaders in a room together for a kick-off meeting, used trained facilitators at tables that sat 10 managers each, and demonstrated how to use the kits.

“Our goal was to help managers become facilitators; not just messengers,” said Megan Yezak, MidMichigan Health’s marketing manager. “So they wouldn’t tell their work groups how this is going to be. Instead, they would ask them questions that would guide their staff to their own insights and uncover obstacles and opportunities.”

Even non-clinical groups such as housekeeping and maintenance were part of this exercise, since they, too, were affected by the rollout. For example, the EMR uses electronic bed boards to notify housekeeping which rooms need servicing. In other words, no one is immune to technological advances.

If you decide to follow suit and create something similar for your own organization, you’ll discover that the kits will also be highly effective in getting people to talk about their fears. And that's a good thing, as I mentioned on page 10.

“One of the things we emphasized during that session was, ‘You’re not telling your work groups how this is going to be. You’re asking them questions and letting them provide valuable feedback.’”

— Megan Yezak, Marketing Manager, MidMichigan Health
4 Share 3 Positive EMR Achievements in Meetings and Daily Communications

Let’s be honest. EMR implementations are tough. Your team and everyone else who’s cascading communications may feel saturated by EMR news, from training announcements to phased roll-outs and countdowns to “go live.” And it’s easy for staff to be caught up in the negative impact of an EMR implementation, especially on workflow changes.

That’s why it’s important to remind everyone about what’s going right and focus on the positive.

In fact, research shows the impact of positive psychology and workplace resilience in the face of any stressful situation that requires change management. That research inspired MidMichigan’s own *Three Good Things* approach.

Now, as communicators, we’re often seen as putting an upbeat spin on even the worst news. But your healthcare organization is going through an EMR implementation for good reasons: improved patient care, time savings and efficiency.

So make it a habit to share three good things about the EMR implementation before every EMR-related meeting. Share these same three things in communications about these meetings. Ask the managers using your kits to do the same at their EMR meetings with staff.

Most of these meetings are scheduled to problem-solve or discuss the latest issue, but don’t forget to point out what you’ve already achieved. Highlighting the positive helps ensure that what has been accomplished will speak louder than the negative.

To learn more about positive psychology in the workplace, read the presentation *Healthcare Worker Resilience: The Intersection of*

5 Shoot a Fun Video about EMR Training

Not every organization has the culture to support the type of video I’m going to talk about, but it’s worth mentioning because humor and vulnerability go a long way in terms of staff morale.

For example, Mary Washington Healthcare in Virginia created a video using a song from the popular Broadway musical, Hamilton!, to address their EMR transition and introduce the EMR implementation committee to the staff.

The hospital is named after George Washington’s mother, so the connection to Hamilton! was a great fit. Dressed in period costume, the CEO and the rest of the team sang about the impact of outdated systems and how the new platform would improve workflows and patient care.

In all, the Mary Washington communications team produced three videos: one to kick off the implementation, one right before launch, and another to thank the EMR vendor. If it sounds a little silly, watch the video. It’s sophisticated, professional, and downright fun!

Mary Washington Healthcare isn’t the only organization to use video. MidMichigan Health, which chose a space theme for their EMR implementation, shot a spaceship video to introduce their new EMR to patients. Here’s how they prefaced it:

MidMichigan Health is on a journey to new frontiers in patient centered care. Our mission? To fully shift our orbit around patients and their families. One Person, One Record is pivotal to our success.
The countdown to lift-off has begun. We need everyone on board. So fasten your seatbelts. Get ready to rocket care forward. One Person, One Record, one giant step to patient-centered care.

Your video doesn’t have to go to extremes. After all, not everyone has the budget for a clever take on a Broadway musical. Instead, you could try a funny video depicting the medical director teaching a C-suite executive how to use the EMR.

Humorous videos with real employees dealing with the new EMR show vulnerability and empathy during a long, complicated process. They engage the staff and get everyone talking about the implementation, the ups and the downs. They also serve to remind everyone that the benefits are ultimately improved patient care.

6 Publish New EMR Words and Titles

As you work with the EMR implementation committee, you and other members will create new roles and titles for those who take on EMR assignments.

Physicians or others who become EMR advocates or experts may be described as Super Users or Subject Matter Experts. Another title I’ve seen used is Clinical Applications Supervisor, who works with employees and the vendor. This person helps develop, test and improve the EMR’s system design.

You can keep staff up to date on these titles and definitions by including a sidebar in your newsletter, a page on your intranet, or whichever communication tool you are using.

Defining these roles and promoting them in your EMR communications can help prepare employees for the change to come, give them insight into who else they may be working with and in what capacity, and set clear expectations. It also provides transparency into the process.
7  Recruit Physician Champions

Physicians are incredibly busy people, and it can be hard to get them to attend EMR implementation meetings or provide feedback. That’s why it’s important to recruit physician champions — such as department chairs for obstetrics or the coronary care unit — to help spread the word and get everyone else on board.

Before it recruited physician champions, MidMichigan Health had a 20% participation rate from physicians at EMR meetings. Once on board, though, physician champions communicated a simple message to their peers: We know you’re busy, but this EMR is coming whether we like or not. We have a limited window of time when we have a say on how this EMR will be implemented, so let’s take this opportunity and give our feedback.

Megan Yezak, MidMichigan’s marketing manager, said, “Our physician champions knew which of their peers were already on board versus those who might struggle and need more support. They also knew how to explain the impact in terms of their own specialty-specific workflows. And sometimes the only practical way to reach providers is to buttonhole them in the hallway and talk to them one on one. We could never have done that with any other communication channels.”

The tactic proved highly effective. Physician participation at EMR meetings reached 80%.

8  Highlight EMR Benefits in Patient Communications

The communications you send to patients about the new EMR won’t be as extensive as those you send to staff, but they’re equally important. These communications will focus not only on
the shift to a patient portal, but also the transformation the EMR brings to patient care.

In your emails and mailings to patients that explain to them how to use the patient portal, be sure to share the benefits the EMR offers, including the following:

- All their medical records, including test results, in one place
- Email communications with their physicians
- Online appointment scheduling
- Easy check-in at doctor’s offices throughout your organization, e.g., fewer forms to fill out
- Telemedicine, if that’s part of your EMR roll-out

The EMR implementation provides many conveniences and time savers for patients, which most of them will embrace. For those who don’t use technology, your organization will most likely still offer options for them via phone or mail, such as making appointments or talking to their doctors, so don’t forget to point that out.

9 Set Up Feedback Mechanisms for Staff and Patients

As you know, communications is a two-way street. The best communicators do more than disseminate information. They also listen to feedback. Of course, you’ll get feedback in your meetings with department heads and other staff members.

But it’s also wise to set up an email address for anyone on the staff to provide feedback on the EMR implementation. This will help you and the EMR implementation committee track issues, identify gaps, and make improvements to the EMR.
Receiving feedback will tip you off to bigger issues you might not otherwise hear about, and these can be addressed in future communications.

You’ll also want to set up a feedback mechanism for patients. If they’re having trouble with the patient portal, they need a way to communicate that by email as well as by phone.

Conclusion

An EMR implementation presents plenty of communications hurdles and challenges, but you’ve taken an important first step. You’ve decided to learn everything you can about how to effectively communicate this initiative to staff and patients.

DON’T STOP AT THIS WHITE PAPER.

→ Reach out to colleagues in your industry.
→ Ask questions on forums for healthcare communicators.
→ Find marketing managers who have gone through this before and pick their brains.

That’s just the beginning. As the EMR implementation gets underway, you’ll discover that the experience will help you and your team grow in new and amazing ways.

Consider how much more involved you’ll be with the organization and its people. You’ll gain a greater understanding of departments, their operations, their staff and their communications needs as never before.

The implementation will also provide increased exposure for your team and allow you to shine as you effectively collaborate with key players and guide the communications process with your expertise.
As important as your job is, however, a successful EMR implementation isn’t the work of just one department (IT) or two (IT and communications).

It depends on everyone in your healthcare organization to be responsible for their part in this massive shift, whether it’s cascading communications to staff, taking the training, offering feedback, or reading an email that relays important information.

Far from an understatement, an EMR implementation from paper-based records is a transformative experience, both for your organization as a whole as well as for patients.

Workflows change to improve efficiency and transparency. Some staff positions are adjusted in the process, causing fear and excitement. Patients finally gain access to their medical records and become their own healthcare advocates.

Such an initiative allows you to truly make a difference in people’s lives. And isn’t that what healthcare is all about?

About the Author

Stephanie Helline is a strategic healthcare communicator who honed her craft at Kaiser Permanente on a number of large campaigns. As the owner of Strategic Health, an agency specializing in healthcare communications, she helps healthcare teams create strategic campaigns that focus on big-picture goals. She and her team facilitate the discovery of clients’ “pains and gains,” and use what they learn to guide the insights and strategies to improve patient care and services.