



Thursday, July 23 2009

Risks and Benefits of Health Information Technology (Health IT)

Business endeavors usually entail risks and benefits. The same is true when selecting health information technology (Health IT). Early in your selection process, consider the common risks and benefits of Health IT adoption.

General risks:

- Workflow disruption. Decreased productivity.
- Costly set-up and costly maintenance.
- Low technological competence among your staff — problems with adjustment, fear of change.
- Unhappiness among your patient population — “you talk to the computer, not me.”
- Technical limits in your practice (no high-speed connection, etc.).
- Chosen Health IT product doesn't adequately fit your needs (e.g., you have to double-document or sustain paper-based processes and electronic processes).

Read more in-depth information on [risks and challenges](#), including workflow and technical issues, product functionality and project management.

General benefits:

- Elimination of chart-pulling, chart-filing, chart loss.
- Easy electronic review of patient information before visits.
- Notification of completed diagnostics and labs to review.
- Notification of required follow-ups, tests, etc.
- Potential reduction in medical errors with decision support and easier access to relevant information.
- Reduction in prescription errors and subsequent time lost communicating with pharmacies.
- Easy communication with patients' other providers — specialists, hospital visits, etc.
- More complete and detailed information available for claims, malpractice suits, etc.
- Potential reduced costs for labor and supplies related to charts and chart maintenance.
- Improved flow of information between staff members.

Learn more about [Health IT benefits](#)

To reap the benefits and avoid the risks of Health IT adoption, you need to carefully assess your own practice, identify benchmarks and a timeline for transition, and plan the entire process thoroughly. This means carefully evaluating your own practice and that of your Health IT vendor before you begin implementation. Use our sections on [self-assessment](#) and [vendor assessment](#) to help you through this process.

Copyright 1995-2009 American Medical Association. All rights reserved.