

Questions & Answers

VistA–Office EHR

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1. What is VistA–Office EHR?

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) of the Department of Veterans Affairs are collaborating to transfer VistA, the VHA’s Electronic Healthcare Record (EHR) technology, to the private physician office setting. VistA–Office EHR will include existing VistA functions of order entry, documentation, results reporting, etc. It will be enhanced in the areas of physician-office patient-registration; interface to existing billing systems; and provide for reporting of quality measures. The expected release date is July 2005.

CMS and VHA are helping to stimulate adoption of EHRs in the physician office setting. They encourage the use of private sector vendor EHRs that are affordable, high quality, interoperable and standards-based. Together, they are providing VistA-Office EHR, a high-quality public-domain solution to supplement EHRs available from private vendors.

2. Is CMS requiring physicians to use the system?

No, but we believe physicians will be eager to use an inexpensive, non-intrusive system that has demonstrated improvements in the quality of patient care. CMS is also investigating programs to provide incentives for physicians that use this or any other EHR system that provides similar functionality.

3. How can vendors use the system?

We expect that VistA-Office EHR will provide new opportunities to vendors. It is an open, standards based foundation that vendors can use as a focal point for developing value-added enhancements, like scheduling and billing, and services, such as installation, training and support.

4. Why did CMS select VistA?

A goal of this project is to provide an affordable, comprehensive EHR. CMS has chosen to use the VistA hospital information system developed by the Department of Veterans Affairs as the core of VistA–Office EHR. VistA was chosen because it is in the public domain and is a software package that is flexible and robust. The system is used in 1,300 diverse sites of care and services 5 million veterans annually. Most importantly, however, over the 20 years that VistA has been in use, the VHA developed the Computerized Patient Record System (CPRS) into a well-defined and documented clinical data repository with a powerful, physician-oriented toolset.

5. Is CMS becoming a software vendor?

No. While CMS will sponsor the development and distribution of VistA–Office EHR to ensure that a minimum level of EHR technology is available to all physicians, an ancillary project goal is to encourage and support a vendor community that can provide value added training, support and software enhancements to VistA–Office EHR users.

6. Is VistA - Office EHR open source?

No. VistA-Office EHR is in the public domain, meaning there are no license fees required to use it. VistA-Office EHR will require license fees for the M (MUMPS) Technology application environment.

7. What benefits will physician offices gain from using VistA-Office EHR?

Vista-Office EHR, or any good EHR for that matter, should offer quality benefits such as:

- Improved data accessibility and organization
- Disease management including clinical decision support
- Electronic prescribing, which improves legibility and automatically checks for interactions.

8. Does the use of EHR technology create more work for physician offices?

Yes and no. Initially, as the office goes through a learning curve and their workflow changes, they will find that it takes longer to do some things than it did before. However, over time, they will learn how to take advantage of their new system to work more efficiently.

9. How do patients benefit when their physicians use EHR technology?

All the quality benefits mentioned above directly impact the quality of care.

10. What is the connection between VistA-Office EHR and DOQ-IT?

Both are programs sponsored by CMS. VistA-Office EHR will be fully compliant with DOQ-IT specifications, including the technology needed to report quality measure data to Quality Improvement Organizations.

11. Why should I choose VistA-Office EHR over other systems?

The choice of an EHR should be based on which product provides the functions that best fit your office workflow. While CMS and VHA encourage the use of high quality, affordable private vendor software, the availability of the VistA-Office EHR software at no cost is an appealing option.

12.If I already have another system in place, should I switch to VistA-Office EHR?

If your current system meets your needs and provides a level of features/functions comparable to VistA-Office EHR, there may be no need to change. CMS and VHA encourage the use of high quality, affordable private vendor software. VistA-Office EHR provides another option when appropriate.

13.What is the operating system for VistA-Office EHR?

VistA-Office EHR will be released to work with the Windows operating system. It also requires a license for Cache, which is the combined programming language and data base management system with which VistA-Office EHR is built.