

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 configure 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 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. Physicians are free to choose other systems, 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, VHA developed the Computerized Patient Record System (CPRS), clinician interface, 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. There is no copyright on the software for VistA-Office EHR since it is in the public domain. VistA-Office EHR may require license fees for the M (MUMPS) Technology application environment. Other licenses for certain code sets, such as Current Procedural Terminology (CPT), will also be required. Further, a software vendor will not be able to modify certain parts of the core VistA software and still market it as VistA, although many other value added products can be developed.

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 office workflow
- Improved access to clinical records
- Checking for drug-drug interactions
- Improved clinical decision support

These systems are also crucial for improving communications between the provider and the patient, as well as for participation in quality improvement programs including pay for performance initiatives. Finally, these systems will form the cornerstone for the implementation of a national healthcare information infrastructure.

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

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. With appropriate utilization, EHRs can result in significant improvements in many areas and a positive return on investment.

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?

The Doctor's Office Quality - Information Technology (DOQ-IT) seeks to increase the use of EHRs in the physician office setting. A key component of this program is the use of the EHR to improve the quality of care for patients with chronic diseases such as heart disease and diabetes as defined by a set of clinical measure specifications. Both VistA-Office EHR and DOQ-IT are programs sponsored by CMS. VistA-Office EHR will be fully compliant with DOQ-IT measure specifications, including the technology needed to report quality measure data to Quality Improvement Organizations. Currently, other vendors of EHR systems have also agreed to participate in the DOQ-IT project. See www.doqit.org for additional information.

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 low 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.

14. How will the software be distributed?

CMS will provide for web access to the software through the Iowa Foundation for Medical Care.

15. How will information be distributed as details become available?

Information will be posted to the [cms.hhs.gov](http://www.cms.hhs.gov) website at <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/quality/pfqi.asp>

16. Will CMS provide additional technical services or support for users of the software?

CMS intends to provide some limited technical support for initial installation and technical problem resolution with the software. CMS intends to reach out to vendors

who provide additional types of training, process redesign, and implementation services that could complement provision of the software.