The case for an Electronic Health Record (EHR): what's in it for your organization?
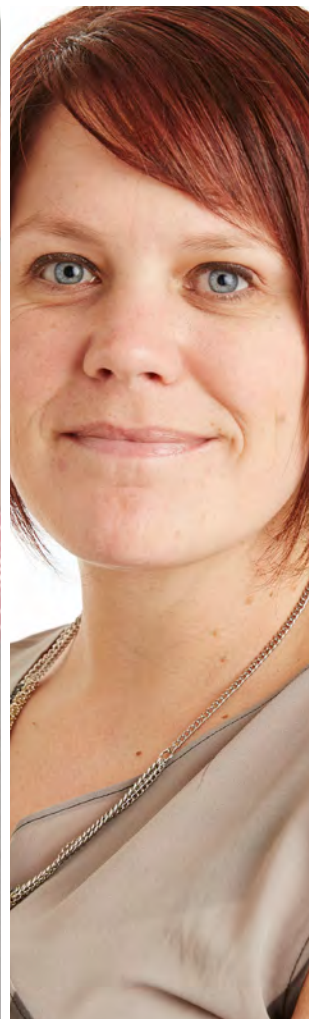
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70%

of senior living operators want to use technology to improve efficiency of staff; customer service; and quality of care.

An EHR can help you to do all that and more.

Why implement an EHR?

Like so many organizations, you're probably wondering, why bother? Why go through all the trouble of implementing an EHR? Will implementing one really benefit my community? How do I really evaluate my organization's need for an EHR?

This piece is designed to help you better understand the pros and cons of implementing an EHR and the value it will bring to your organization.

Why status quo is not your friend.

How do you measure the difference between "just fine" and "why did we wait so long"? How do you know if it's really worth the money and time? Unfortunately the answer isn't a one size fits all formula – it's different for every organization. But, a growing number of senior living operators are seeing the value in technology. In fact, a recent survey conducted among LeadingAge members showed that more than 70% of respondents want to use technology to 1) improve efficiency of staff; 2) improve customer service; and 3) improve quality of care.

91%

of senior living operators believe that EHR technology delivers greater visibility and access to information across their organization.

The trouble with paper.

Let's face it; our industry is not very progressive when it comes to technology. Technology can be expensive and implementation is a time-intensive project that will, in all likelihood, throw your operation off track while it's underway. But, the demands for data and expectations around demonstrating quality make technology necessary. In the same LeadingAge survey, 91% of respondents almost unanimously agreed that EHR technology delivers greater visibility and access to information across their organization.

An EHR is the backbone of a strong organization that will be able to weather the storm as our industry continues to evolve. Collecting and sharing knowledge about your residents through a centralized platform will result in more confident decision-making to plan, deliver, monitor, and bill for the wide variety of services that you offer.

Pros

- ✔ Reduced potential for medication errors.
- ✔ Improved quality of documentation.
- ✔ More accurate billing.
- ✔ Improved communication with staff, residents, and families/loved ones.
- ✔ Fewer data entry errors.
- ✔ Easier access to charts Improved visibility into operation.

Cons

- ✖ Time consuming project.
- ✖ Resistance to change.
- ✖ Budget.

# Let's take a look at these in detail, starting with the cons.

No budget. It's normal to have competing priorities, especially when you haven't planned for such a project. But, ask yourself, can you afford to wait until next year? Do a quick ROI for your organization. Do you know how much money you may be missing out on each month due to unscheduled services? Would it be worth it if you could prevent a costly medication error? What kind of information are your residents and families requesting? Can you prove that you provide the quality of care to ensure you're "referral-worthy"?

Resistance to change is a common challenge when adopting a new way of doing things. Some staff members may be uncomfortable with technology. Some may think that the way you do things now is "just fine". To help make them more comfortable, involve some of the more resistant members of your staff in the project early. Often the most resistant folks become the most vocal champions when they're included in decisions and have a say in the transition.

This is a time-consuming project that will involve assessing every process you have in place. This sounds like torture, but in many cases, this will be to your benefit. Assessing your processes allows you to adjust and improve the ones that are no longer working. A good EHR system enables you to build your organization's processes into the system you implement. Make no mistake, it will at times be painful and time consuming, but when you come out on the other side, you will ask yourself, "how did we ever do without this system"?

Assessing Your Need
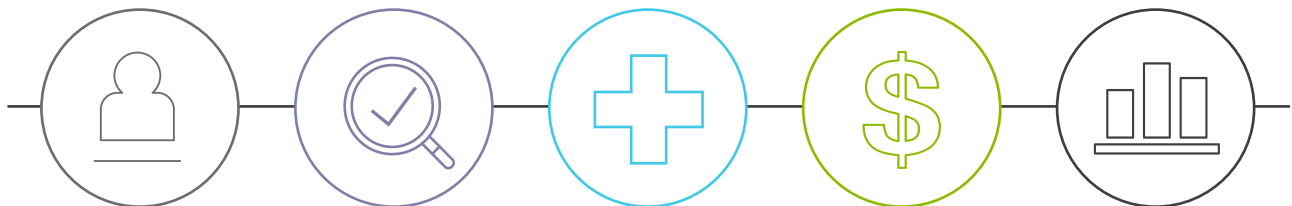
What kind of information are your residents and families requesting?

Are you referral-worthy?

Can you prove that you provide the quality of care?

Would it be worth it if you could prevent a costly medication error?

Can you afford to wait until next year?

Fortunately, the list of pros for using an EHR is longer and in many cases, easier to quantify.

Improved care coordination is something that we are always striving for. As healthcare has advanced, the delivery of high-quality medical care has come to require teams of healthcare providers. Each member of the team tends to have specific, limited interactions with the resident and, depending on the team member's area of expertise, a somewhat different view of the resident. Using an integrated EHR platform will strengthen the coordination of your residents' care across the organization. EHRs have the potential to integrate and organize the resident's care information and facilitate its distribution among care team members involved in a resident's care.

Medication management, when done manually is prone to errors and manual reconciliation. An electronic medication administration (eMAR) system will allow you to keep track of medications and ensure the resident is getting the right medication, at the right dose, at the right time. If the care team member finds the resident sleeping and needs to return to administer a medication, an eMAR will remind them to return in a few minutes. Many communities devote several hours each month to reconciling medications. A good eMAR system will allow your care team to press a button and complete this task in seconds, rather than hours.
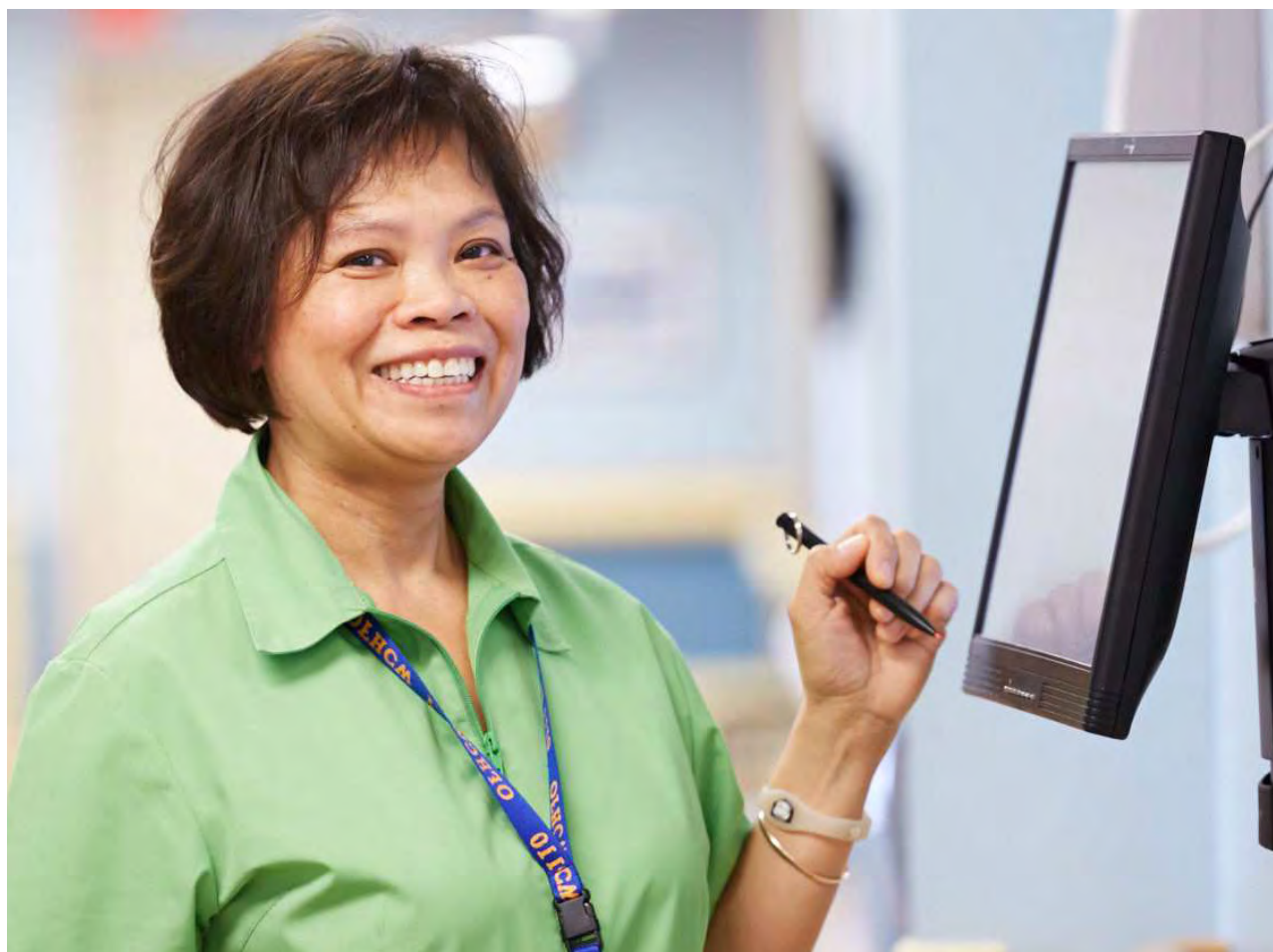
More accurate billing can be accomplished by utilizing an EHR. An integrated EHR platform can help your business office stay on top of payments and improve the speed with which you get paid. Senior living organizations need the ability to accurately bill based on occupancy, service levels and add-on services delivered. A strong EHR platform will enable staff to produce clear and concise statements for residents and families to understand. It should expedite the receivables process by accommodating the most popular methods of service billing while enabling staff to generate detailed resident statements broken down by living unit arrangement, service package received, and cost sharing agreements.

Operational visibility is impossible in a paper environment. There's no easy way to know what's going on across the organization, in real-time without an EHR that allows users to access a dashboard showing metrics in their discipline. For example, if you're an administrator, it's good to know about new and incoming residents. You want to know about cash flow. If you're the Wellness Director, you want to know how the medication passes are going. Visibility in an EHR is much more efficient than waiting for someone to compile a report by hand, on paper.

There are additional pros that you may be able to identify based on your processes. Start by assessing how you do things now. Determine if you think automating them might be better. You decide on the efficiencies that will apply to your organization. How much money will you save by making those areas more efficient?

Where do I go from here?

Talk to your peers to learn what EHR they use. Have a candid conversation and identify and then avoid the mistakes they made. Read reviews from users who can give you the inside scoop. Find out which vendors you can trust. Talk to vendors that are reputable and have the size and commitment to stay with you for the long haul. Look for a vendor that has a large client base and the resources to keep up with the changing senior living industry.

So, once you've done all that, how do you know if it's really worth it? And, when is a good time to get started? Short answer is that yes, it's worth it and there is no best time to get started. If you think your organization is ready, then get started now.

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PointClickCare has helped over 12,000 skilled nursing and senior living facilities meet the challenges of senior care by enabling them to achieve the business results that matter – enriching the lives of their residents, improving financial and operational health, and mitigating risk. PointClickCare's cloud-based software platform takes a person-centered approach to managing senior care, connecting healthcare providers across the senior care continuum with easy to use, regulatory compliant solutions for improved resident outcomes, enhanced financial performance, and staff optimization. For more information on PointClickCare's ONC certified software solutions, please visit www.pointclickcare.com.

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