EHR Certification:
The Impact on the Long-term Care Industry & PointClickCare’s Approach to Certification

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Introduction

The Electronic Health Record (EHR) has had many definitions since the widespread acceptance of the term in the 1960s. Today, with the importance of health information reaching unprecedented levels due to demographic and financial pressures and the resulting introduction of new healthcare legislation, the EHR has become the single most pervasive topic in healthcare infrastructure. A non-profit known as the Certification Commission for Health Information Technology (CCHIT) has been instrumental in the formulation of the current common understanding of the EHR.

The CCHIT, founded in 2004 and supported by a number of healthcare information management industry associations and the United States Federal government, has been almost singularly responsible for EHR definition and certification across the entire spectrum of healthcare segments over the last seven years. EHR certification will have significant implications for healthcare providers, including Long-term Care providers, healthcare technology vendors and patients themselves.

This paper discusses those implications, as well as PointClickCare’s plans for certification of its EHR platform.
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EHR Certification and the Regulatory Bodies

Driven by the need for improvements in healthcare quality, safety, efficiency, and access, the CCHIT has certified EHR technology since 2006. Starting with Ambulatory EHR, the CCHIT has since worked with industry stakeholders to develop certification programs for many healthcare domains (e.g., Ambulatory, Inpatient, Emergency, Long-term and Post-Acute Care) and domain add-ons (e.g., Ambulatory Child Health or Cardiovascular Medicine).

The introduction of EHR public funding in 2009 formalized a partnership between the CCHIT and the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC) to further establish EHR certification guidelines, and spawned a term known as “Meaningful Use.” Regulated by the ONC, Meaningful Use is meant to test not only the validity of EHR technology, but also its use in a provider’s setting as a prerequisite to available public EHR funding.

While definitions of a ‘certified EHR’ range by domain, the general requirements according to the HHS are:

- EHRs are secure
- EHRs maintain data confidentiality
- EHRs work with other systems to share information
- EHRs can perform a set of well-defined functions

In 2010, the certification program for Long-term and Post-Acute Care technologies became available through the CCHIT, along with Skilled Nursing and Home Health domain add-ons. In addition, ONC provides a certification program for LTPAC technologies.

Through the ONC certification program, vendors may certify portions of their systems, such as Care Planning or Admissions, rather than the entire EHR. Vendors certifying through the CCHIT must certify their entire EHR application based upon the current testing criteria. It is important that providers have an understanding of the different types of certification programs and under which their vendor is currently certified or plans to be certified.

How EHR Certification will Impact the Long-term Care Provider

Responsibility for Long-term Care and Post-Acute EHR certification falls directly to the technology system vendor (PointClickCare or another EHR vendor). It is this organization that will make large financial investments and undergo rigorous testing of their EHR product, according to CCHIT and ONC criteria, to obtain certification status.

It is important that the Long-term Care provider select a vendor that has made a firm commitment to certify their EHR solution. A certified EHR will demonstrate measurable benefit to this type of provider in four distinct areas:

1. A certified EHR assures the provider that the technology has integrated functionality, interoperability and security. According to the strict guidelines of CCHIT and ONC, a certified EHR will eliminate many errors associated with disparate systems, like mistakes from re-keying data. It will ensure that a provider has a solution that meets regulatory guidelines in the area of
security (eg. HIPAA), and will develop the external integration with other healthcare segments (eg. hospitals, therapy centers) supporting organizational growth.

2 A certified EHR positions the provider for the future. As with all regulation, certification criteria will continue to evolve with the changing needs of providers and their patients. Maintaining EHR certification will mean that the Long-term Care provider has the best, and most accepted, standards in healthcare computing. Using a certified EHR means that a provider is ready when certification becomes mandatory and/or ARRA funding becomes available, reducing the heavy financial and resource burden of finding a new EHR system later.

3 The criteria of certified EHR creates an independent baseline for technology evaluation. Long-term Care organizations evaluating EHR software now have independent certification of the technology’s capabilities. This delivers a baseline of comparison which can shorten (not replace) the evaluation cycle.

4 A certified EHR proves that the vendor is making investments on the provider’s behalf. Though EHR certification is voluntary, leaders in the Long-term Care industry expect that this will be a mandatory requirement, either on its own or to qualify for future public funding. As a result, those vendors that are making needed investments in EHR certification today are making a firm commitment to the providers of tomorrow.

PointClickCare’s Approach to EHR Certification

Along with other of Long-term Care EHR vendors, PointClickCare has announced its intentions to pursue EHR certification through the CCHIT exclusively. This means that PointClickCare will certify the entire EHR system under the current CCHIT testing criteria. PointClickCare is currently taking a pragmatic approach to Long-term Care and Post-Acute Care EHR certification through a number of staged initiatives:

- Requirement Analysis (Completed): PointClickCare has vigorously analyzed the CCHIT EHR certification requirements comparing them to the capabilities of PointClickCare’s EHR platform. Differences in the functionality, interoperability and security have been identified and passed to development for future product releases.

- Product Development, Testing and Quality Assurance (Winter-Spring 2012): Based on the identified requirements, the product development team is building enhancements to the EHR platform to meet CCHIT certification criteria.

- Phase I Certification (Summer 2012): PointClickCare submits application to the CCHIT for certification. Certification will require rigorous, objective and consistent testing with 100% compliance. The evaluation of PointClickCare’s EHR platform includes a virtual inspection by a CCHIT Proctor and a number of independent expert jurors. Once obtained within this process,
PointClickCare will be a certified EHR vendor as identified by CCHIT and in compliance with the Office of the National Coordinator.

- **Re-evaluation (Fall 2012):** PointClickCare re-evaluates the product against new requirements that are released by CCHIT since the initial certification criteria development. PointClickCare returns to the Requirement Analysis and Product Development activities to maintain certification.

- **Phase II Certification (2013):** By 2013, new certification requirements are required by CCHIT. PointClickCare re-enters the certification process to maintain approved status.

- **Re-evaluation (2014-2015):** PointClickCare re-evaluates the product against new requirements that are released by CCHIT since 2013 certification. PointClickCare returns to the Requirement Analysis and Product Development activities to maintain certification.

- **Phase III Certification (2015):** By 2015, should new certification requirements be released by CCHIT, PointClickCare will re-enter the process to maintain certification.

**Interoperability and Health Information Exchanges (HIEs)**

One of the key criteria within the CCHIT certification is the mandate of an approved system incorporating and generating Continuation of Care Documents (CCDs) that can be used by providers to share key resident information amongst disparate systems across the healthcare spectrum, which includes data repositories such as Health Information Exchanges (HIEs).

PointClickCare is currently engaged in discussions with clients and their respective HIEs and, while there are significant concepts and ideas being explored, actual movement from a development/execution perspective is rather slow. At this stage, many organizations are more focused on securing an innovation grant and/or funds to support their efforts. To date, most state organizations and clients have been primarily focused on what data to share beyond Admit/Discharge/Transfer (ADT) information, specifically to support the Resident/Patient Locator service. One of the major challenges facing vendors is that HIEs do not fully understand the information that a LTC EHR system is capable of sharing. To overcome this, PointClickCare is working to bring our expertise into these discussions to advance the conversations and offer innovative solutions that will safely progress LTC providers into the realm of interoperability.

PointClickCare’s vision is to leverage the HIEs in areas that can provide the most value to clients and providers. Beyond ADT events, PointClickCare believes that leveraging the CCD to better support transitions of care is a top priority. Over the last year, PointClickCare has invested heavily in the early development of an HIE tool that will allow the organization to fulfill this requirement. PointClickCare is currently utilizing the tool to connect and exchange information with various pharmacies to support electronic order entry, as well as receiving information for integration with the eMAR.

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In addition, PointClickCare is exploring possibilities to connect to many of the laboratory and diagnostic providers, enabling test results to be more easily integrated into the EHR, CCD and HIEs. However, most laboratory and diagnostic companies have very limited technical capability to support these types of integrations.

PointClickCare views the HIE as a promising means to support the longitudinal heath record, as well as a conduit for information exchange at transition of care. Thus, PointClickCare is actively working to evaluate integration opportunities with HIEs and determine how such integrations add value for LTC providers.

**Conclusion**

While unsurprising given the investment required, certification will consolidate the EHR vendor landscape, as providers favor certified products based on a number of quantifiable benefits. In all likelihood, EHR certification will become mandatory in the foreseeable future as interoperability between all segments of healthcare begin working more closely together. Long-term Care providers will need to be prudent in their future evaluation of EHR solutions to avoid falling victim to failed vendors, similar to the MDS 2.0 to 3.0 conversions in late 2010.

PointClickCare has an unwavering commitment to EHR certification. The company’s systematic approach to product development and EHR certification will ensure that PointClickCare’s customers will gain the value of a certified system and be well positioned for future regulatory change.

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**About PointClickCare**

PointClickCare removes the complexity of EHR, providing our customers with a proven formula for success that includes the flexibility, ease-of-use, and industry-leading technology your business can rely on. As the fastest growing EHR platform more than 5,000 Long-term care facilities use to efficiently manage and automate their complex operations, why would you trust your business to anyone else? For more information on PointClickCare, please visit [www.pointclickcare.com](http://www.pointclickcare.com).