The Secrets of Optimizing your EHR

1. Making your EHR run better = leverage.
2. On your mark, get set… STOP!
3. First, a GAP analysis. Then what?
4. EHR Optimization in Dermatology.
5. Meaningful Use: Another chance to optimize.
6. Optimize your practice management (PM) system, too.
8. Ten reasons to choose NextGen Healthcare EHR and PM solutions.
leverage  [lev-er-ij]

- Increased means of accomplishing a purpose
- The use of a small investment to gain a very high return
- To use a quality or advantage to obtain a desired result
Making your EHR run better = leverage

Yes. That’s what EHR optimization is all about. Creating leverage for your practice to be all it can be for your patients, your staff, and you!

It’s not that hard. This eBook summarizes best practices for fine-tuning your EHR system.
Question:
Are your physicians or staff satisfied with your EHR? Or are they frustrated and struggling?

Answer:
EHR optimization can help staff go from “like” to “love” your EHR...
...And can eliminate root causes of frustration and struggles with your EHR

How should you begin your EHR optimization process? Read on.
Optimize your EHR to enhance patient care.

Your patients will appreciate your efforts to optimize your EHR. When you’re working optimally with your EHR you navigate faster and easier with your system… and you can focus more on your patient.

*It’s just that simple.* You spend less time on the screen and more time with your eyes and ears on the patient. Better patient interaction can result.

You’ll be better able to pick up important nuances of what patients say… and how they say it. With an optimized EHR, you’re less likely to miss your patient’s body language when they ask questions or state reasons for their visit.
On your mark, get set, STOP!
OK. With the important “why” question answered, let’s get on with “how.” **The very first step? Stop.** Yes, **stop… and look around.**

**Look at every aspect of your practice. Every part of every workflow that involves using your EHR system.**

- Know the workflow(s) of every person in your office that touches the EHR –
  - Inputs
  - Reviews and checks
  - Documentation
  - Reports
  - Data sharing (with patients and/or HIEs)
- Claims submission process
- Data back-up
- Data analysis
- Practice performance measurement
- Integration with your practice management (PM) software (full? partial? workflow implications?)
- Performance and role of 3rd party interfaces in your EHR and PM system(s)
- How much of your administrative workflow (PM system) integrates with your EHR?
- Who does what tasks related to your system(s)?
- How can (or should) each staff member’s work style and/or preferences be incorporated or adjusted for the most effective use of your EHR?
Actual vs. potential performance.
In other words: Conduct a workflow analysis – a “GAP Analysis.”

It’s the best way to identify “gaps” between the optimal use of your software resources and your current workfl ows and system usage patterns.

Include everyone.

Understand every step and stage of all staff workflows inside your office – physicians, nursing staff, medical assistants, clinicians, etc., as those workflows relate to patient flow and back-end medical coding and billing.

• It’s the only way to truly uncover how to optimize your EHR.
• It’s the only way to leverage the performance already built into your EHR.
• And it’s the only way you can communicate your optimization needs back to your EHR vendor.
What does my EHR vendor have to do with optimizing my EHR?

Everything.
Because they know your system better than you do. So after they know your specific objectives for leveraging your EHR, they can get you there much faster (than on your own).

You may not need much help. Or, you may need a lot. It doesn’t matter. Just be sure to involve your EHR vendor because they are expert at getting the most from their own system.

Take full advantage of your software features in the most efficient way possible.

Partner with your EHR vendor.
What’s Next? After the GAP Analysis?
Every EHR optimization process will be unique to every practice or facility. It will depend on your clinical and administrative workflows, patient populations, culture of your practice, and the goals and objectives you have for your practice.

**So what’s next, after the GAP analysis?** Step-by-step alterations and improvements in how you and your staff input, share, report, and back up your clinical and administrative data using your EHR system.

Are you or your staff using “work-arounds” instead of solving root cause workflow issues?
EHR Optimization: Not a one-time deal!
This is ongoing. Once you start, don’t stop. Once you get the hang of it, you’ll realize that fine-tuning your EHR system is ongoing.

It has to be. Consider how fast and how much the healthcare landscape changes every year. For example, part of system optimization includes incorporating or adjusting workflows to stay in regulatory compliance or to attest for Meaningful Use (MU) incentive revenue. Or maybe your practice is expanding (or contracting) or you’re managing staff turnover.

These are all reasons why EHR system optimization is continuous.
It’s not just about “how to fill out the screen.”
It’s about walking your staff members (providers, clinical support staff, administrative staff) through the tasks they perform each day with a focus on how to minimize the number of touches needed to accomplish each task. Or how to accomplish new tasks, or alter existing ones, using features of your EHR system that no one on your staff was aware of.

You might ask: “Can I accomplish this training within normal business hours?” The answer is: “Not very well.”

Schedule some of this training in addition to your normal office hours. Or don’t schedule patients for a few blocks of time each month – especially in the beginning. The overtime costs, or the loss in productivity, will help increase your long-term return on investment (ROI) from your technology system.
Personalize and recognize differences.
One size does not fit all. Just like there's 10 different ways to accomplish the same task using word processing software, so, too, does your EHR offer many different ways to accomplish the same task.

Particularly with physicians, don’t try to force them to use the EHR all the same way. Physicians have different preferences and clinical work styles that a robust EHR can accommodate.

Honor physician preferences as you work through EHR optimization cycles; you can do both.

“Superusers” in your practice can help others use the system better.
Anticipate stress and extra effort.
EHR vendors develop system functionalities that can make various data capture and sharing tasks easier, but to say that EHR optimization “is easy” isn’t accurate.

Worth it? Yes. Easy? Not the right word, although, the process of continuous optimization does get easier with time and experience.

**Do it again. And again. And again.**

EHR optimization is an iterative process. The myriad functions and features of your system will bring new efficiencies to your practice. But it’s not realistic to expect those improvements to happen all at once, during the first few months of your EHR optimization process.

If you and your staff adopt a “long-haul” mindset, EHR optimization can become second nature.
One-on-one checkups every six months.
Many practices make it a point to schedule one-on-one EHR optimization sessions with each staff member twice a year or even four times a year, in addition to ongoing optimization activity.

This extra one-on-one face time gives you a chance to really ferret out concerns or constraints that individual staff members may have that might not come to light in day-to-day activities and workflows.

Set goal dates for using more advanced EHR features.
EHR Optimization in Dermatology.
Last year the American Academy of Dermatology Association (AADA) surveyed its members about the extent to which they use all of the functionality of their EHRs*. The percentage of EHR users not using the full functionality of their EHR system ranged from about two percent to almost 15 percent for various tasks, such as taking notes, electronic prescribing, integrating lab results and pathology slides into the EHR, photo uploading/archiving, ordering lab tests, accessing drug formularies, and having the ability to draw on body diagrams/photos.

These are all lost opportunities to optimize the EHR in dermatology practices.
A dermatology-specific EHR solution is the true “starting point” for EHR optimization in a dermatology practice.
You’re a specialist. With special feature and functionality needs unique to your dermatology practice and patients.

**Trying to optimize an EHR that doesn’t have broad functionality in your specialty is a losing battle.**

Can your EHR generate the high-quality digital photos essential to accurate diagnosis, patient education, and clinical data sharing? Yes? Great! Have you optimized that functionality?

Almost 15 percent of dermatologists using EHRs with the ability to capture and draw on body diagrams and photos… don’t use the function, according to the AADA survey.
Configurable dermatology templates are key to EHR optimization.
An EHR with configurable dermatology templates can enhance documentation and workflow. Specialized dermatology functionality can facilitate a quick exam and treatment plan. For example, Mohs-specific templates enable detailed tracking of multiple stages of Mohs surgery.

When you optimize an EHR that's designed for dermatologists, you enhance dermatology-specific functionality, content, and clinical decision support. You get the most from your EHR, where it truly counts.
Use caution when pre-populating dermatology templates.
Using shortcuts, combination boxes, checkboxes, and diagrams can speed clinical data entry.

The challenge lies in making sure old patient visit data, pulled forward to pre-populate the newest encounter note, doesn’t make your notes appear to be duplicates of previous notes.

It’s an easy trap to fall into. Especially when the majority of patient encounters are the same diagnoses over and over again – acne, alopecia, skin cancer/pre-cancers, full-body exams, etc. “Copy and paste” is not an EHR optimization technique.

As a starting point, use dermatology specialists from your EHR vendor to uncover the EHR optimization techniques that provide the most initial value to your practice.
While you’re at it... “optimize your patients” with patient portal.
More and more practices are ramping up patient portal technology as part of their EHR optimization process. Makes sense. Particularly if you’re pursuing MU incentive revenue.

Having digital, two-way communication with your patient population is a natural extension of optimizing your EHR. And patients like the new options and convenience of using a patient portal to connect with your practice.

The technology is a productivity booster for both the patient and your practice.
Optimize your practice management system, too.
When you optimize your practice management (PM) system, you use its reporting capabilities to gain insight into the overall performance of your practice. You identify opportunities to increase revenue.

Practices that use an integrated EHR and PM platform can leverage similar reporting functionalities in their EHR to gauge the effectiveness of clinical protocols and even measure the productivity of physicians.

You scale the reporting functions on your EHR and PM system to suit your clinical and administrative performance objectives.

An EHR and PM system that’s not fully integrated hinders optimum, overall system performance.
Use the latest software releases from your EHR vendor.
When you use the most current version(s) of software offered by your EHR vendor you automatically position your practice for optimum use of your software.

The newest software versions fix previously identified problems.

The new features vendors develop for their latest releases can help your practice get more from your EHR. The primary driver for new versions of software is to provide users with the most streamlined workflows and ease-of-use as possible.

Achieve the highest possible productivity while increasing patient care quality.
Ten Reasons to choose NextGen Healthcare EHR solutions.
Our entire product suite, including EHR and PM, is integrated for a complete solution.

NextGen® Ambulatory EHR version 5.8.2 is 2014 Edition compliant*

Delivers a strong, proven ROI via better cash flow, streamlined reimbursements, and more.

Provides the foundation you need to meet quality goals such as MU, PCMH, ACO, and more.

Developed with the patient in mind to help you deliver quality care.
Comes with a proven optimization methodology designed to fit your specific needs.

Countless physicians have quickly adopted and embraced our user-friendly design.

Comes with 24/7 support via a 100% U.S.-based support team.

Scalable to any practice size, specialty, or role—and can be personalized to each user.

Content and functionality developed by physicians for physicians.
NextGen Healthcare is a strategic partner, not just a vendor. We’re ready to partner with you to help you meet your evolving goals, including getting the best and most from your NextGen Healthcare solutions.