ABSTRACT

The successful implementation and go-live of an Electronic Health Record (EHR) is the culmination of years of planning and work. Understanding and preparing for the challenges that an organization faces in the weeks leading to go-live and effectively navigating those challenges will ultimately determine the project’s success.

Successful implementations are the result of effectively managing the months of planning and preparation for a go-live and the rush of activity and preparation in the weeks leading to go-live. How do you prepare and support your organization, your end users and your application teams? Are you prepared for the obstacles that await you?

A trusted partner that has a history of leading clients through the challenges of large scale technical EHR go-lives is imperative. Optimum Healthcare IT provides years of EHR implementation and go-live experience and insight that will ensure a successful outcome.

In most cases, preparation for an Epic EHR implementation begins years in advance of the actual go-live date or dates. Implementations of this magnitude are not only the culmination of intense planning and preparation, but are likely one of the most significant challenges an organization will undertake – one that will be felt in nearly every aspect of the organization. It will alter the way clinicians work, the way revenue is captured, the way information is reported and analyzed, and the way the organization operates. Invariably, no matter how much planning and preparation goes into the go-live, there is always a rush of activity in the months and weeks leading to go-live. The changes are epic ... pun intended!

So how do we get there? How can you properly prepare for an implementation that will effectively change the way your organization operates? What is waiting for you in those final months and weeks leading to and including the go-live?

IMPLEMENTATION PREPARATION

COMMUNICATION AND ORGANIZATIONAL INVOLVEMENT

Throughout the life of the project, thorough organizational communication is one key to success – both as a rule and when implementing major technological platforms. The dialogue between operational leadership, IT, clinical and financial end-users and super users lead to the most successful EHR implementation projects. People fear what they don’t understand and the best way to address fear is to communicate openly and transparently.

In the months and weeks leading to go-live, meetings that include the aforementioned stakeholders yield the most impactful results. Organizational, clinical and department leadership participation, visibility and support of the EHR initiative are key success factors. End users must know that their leaders are engaged, accessible and invested in the success of the project.
A successful training program is the result of many months of planning and communicating organizational expectations. There are always a myriad of logistical elements that go into the planning process – identifying training locations, setting up classrooms and determining how registration and completion of courses will be tracked is important to identify early on, as this will likely be one of the largest training initiatives the organization has undertaken. Identifying trainers who understand the system and workflows, and how different types of employees may require different types of learning, whether it be web-based, classroom or one-on-one training, is essential. Finally, communicating training expectations to future users of the system will ensure that everyone is trained and ready for the system to go live.

- **Physician Personalization Labs** - A key feature within Epic is the ability to personalize the software for each physician's needs. The modules will be the same for all users, but Epic can be customized to accommodate an individual provider’s preferences when entering clinical documentation and orders, allowing providers to focus on time spent with their patients rather than time spent in the system. In the weeks leading to go-live, personalization labs – an extension of training – should be set up where trainers can work with physicians to make sure their templates and orders are set up; Every step that can be taken to prepare for go-live helps ease the transition, and this is a big one.

- **Technical Dress Rehearsal** - The technical dress rehearsal is a planned event where all equipment that will be used during the Epic go-live is checked prior to the actual event. This includes everything from servers to monitors, scanners and devices, printers, etc. For example, printing is a common issue during Epic implementations, and Technical Dress Rehearsals allow your implementation teams to check and recheck printing processes before they go-live.

- **End User Dress Rehearsal** - Dress rehearsals allow end-users to marry the new EHR technology with what may be newly redefined processes to evaluate how well they are functioning together. End-users are asked to sign on to the EHR system, test their training, validate that they can accomplish what they need to accomplish during a typical day’s work, ask questions and continue to learn in a safe environment. It is an extension of training, allowing end-users to build much-needed confidence going in to go-live. It is also an opportunity to address any last-minute quirks in the system's setup. A constant dialogue between end users, Super Users, application teams and IT is vital to taking advantage of this opportunity.

- **Super User Preparedness** - Super User Preparedness, and to a great extent your Super User Program overall, may be the most important personnel aspect of a successful go-live and sustained long-term success. When establishing the parameters of a Super User program, organizations must look, think and plan for the long term. If your Super User program is only set up to get you through go-live, you’re doing end-users and your organization a major disservice. A well thought out and managed Super User Program should serve as your primary source of knowledge transfer from implementation specialists and go-live consultants to in-house staff and fulltime employees. Super Users should be engaged during the planning process, implementation, optimization, and beyond. They should act as the liaison between the application teams and end users. Super Users are distributors and gatherers of information as they communicate directly with end users and report issues back to the application teams. When done correctly, it’s one of the most effective ways to check the pulse of the end users and ensure that you’re addressing the issues that matter to them the most.
Another aspect of preparation is making sure that your application teams are ready for go-live. Go-live is the culmination of years of preparation and work. The application itself must be ready to go, the organization must be ready to go, and application team members must be ready to go as well. Set expectations with team members early on regarding limited vacations and longer hours during the initial 24/7 support. Ensure that there is a plan in place to compensate them for the extra time they’ve dedicated to ensuring the success of the project.

GO-LIVES ARE USUALLY THOUGHT OF IN TERMS OF TWO COMPONENTS: COMMAND CENTER SUPPORT AND END-USER FLOOR SUPPORT.

COMMAND CENTER SUPPORT

When properly planned for and done correctly, mapping out a go-live strategy can save a lot of headaches at go-live. It’s often wise to designate a Go-Live Coordinator or Project Manager to ensure the logistics and processes necessary to support the organization are in place and functioning before and throughout the go-live period. Some of the items that should be considered when creating a go-live strategy include the following:

\Command Center Logistics: Consider location of the Command Center, network connectivity, printers, copy machines, telephone access, as well as the smaller things like availability of food, water, coffee, etc.
COMMAND CENTER SUPPORT (CONTINUED)

**Issue Management:** No matter how well you prepare and communicate, there are going to be issues at go-live. The key to surviving short-term and thriving long-term is prioritization and perspective. A best practice is to develop an issues management system where issues can be prioritized by level of importance or impact, categorized into the type of issue and managed accordingly. Often organizations develop and monitor a top ten list. Prioritizing the top ten issues and walking through the status of each during cross-functional meetings provides perspective for everyone. Departments can see and hear the progress on their issue, as well as what’s going on in other areas; often they can better understand that their issue, while important to them, may not be the most pressing issue at the time. There are some common issues that invariably present themselves during go-lives. For example, security is a common go-live issue; if end users can’t get into the system, it must be addressed and quickly. Processes can be implemented to handle these types of issues immediately without impacting more complex issues that require more analysis and time.

The question is not, ‘Will there be issues?”. The question is, “How many issues will you have, how severe will they be and how do you most effectively prioritize and address them?”

**Phone Systems:** Often organizations will put metrics in place to monitor the number of calls coming into the Command Center – how many calls are coming in, how long it takes for the calls to be answered, the number of hang ups, etc. It is imperative that the organization feels that the Command Center is accessible and that their issues are being addressed. Communication not only when the ticket originates, but also when the issue is resolved must occur.

**Tickets:** To properly capture and address support tickets, you must have a system in place, and your application teams and support staff must be familiar with the system. There will be a spike in tickets at go-live. With the influx of users accessing the system for the first time, it’s inevitable. Not to worry, this spike will taper off over time.

**END-USER FLOOR SUPPORT**

Above all, it’s important for end users to remember that the system is a tool to support operational workflow. The EHR doesn’t replace the operational workflow; the patient and clinical care come first. Provider schedules may need to be adjusted to accommodate the learning curve of the new system, and adequate end-user floor support must be scheduled to support the end-users, including the night shift. Often the support to staff ratios is higher during the first two weeks of go-live and tapers off gradually over the course of a month.

End-user floor support should be available to answer questions, assist in entering support tickets, and to be the eyes and ears of the types of issues that are arising on the floors. Beginning and ending shift ‘turnover meetings’ can keep communication channels open between the Command Center and the Floors. Delivering a successful EHR go-live is dependent on factors which can be mitigated with proper planning and execution. To do so, you must be able to pull from knowledge and experience gained. Optimum Healthcare IT has the clinical expertise and technological experience to ensure success for all our clients.
THE RIGHT RESOURCES AT THE RIGHT TIME

While preparation is certainly a key ingredient for successful go-lives, all the planning in the world can yield minimal results if you don’t have the right people in place to execute the plan. In addition to the years of experience Optimum brings to the table, we also specialize in allocating the right resources – the right people – for your project at the right time. Optimum Healthcare IT uses its SkillMarket portal to not only manage your go-live resources, but to optimize resources based on your needs, their skillset, and geo-location, which also saves you money by selecting qualified go-live support that is close to you.

Each of our go-live consultants has a profile and is graded based on experience, certifications, attitude and previous client feedback. We work to provide the best possible resources throughout the life of your implementation. Our commitment to your needs ensures that your implementation will be successful throughout your planning, go-live, stabilization and optimization. And once you make it through the arduous task of implementing an electronic health record, the challenge then becomes sustaining it and meaningfully using it. Optimum Healthcare IT has the best Go-Live team in the business and once they’ve successfully helped you install the system, our Managed Services team can help you support it.

BEST IN KLAS

Optimum Healthcare IT was recently awarded two Best in KLAS and one Category Leader distinction in the "2017 Best in KLAS: Software and Services" annual report – as rated by healthcare providers across the United States.

As we’ve stated, Epic EHR implementations take years to plan and a multitude of experienced professionals to execute. Most organizations are not prepared for the magnitude of the change they are undertaking and how much it will impact the entire organization. There will be issues and the most successful organizations realize that they will need help and seek experienced firms that can assist with the entire life cycle of the implementation. They find a full-service firm that understands the challenges on the horizon and how to navigate them.

Optimum Healthcare IT has the proven experience and resources to help you get there. Your success is our success.