JANUARY 2010 NEWSLETTER

It's that time of year again when medical practices review their strategies and reset goals and priorities. Information technology (IT), including at the very least your practice management system, electronic health records (EHR), and your website, should be at the very top of everybody's list for several important reasons:

Margie Satinsky

FIVE REASONS TO MAKE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY A 2010 PRIORITY

1. The Link to Quality of Care

There's a relationship between good information and the provision of quality care. When physicians have easy access to patient information through both their own record system and through electronic connections with other providers, they have more data on which to base diagnoses and treatment.

2. Operational Efficiencies

There are operational advantages to be gained by using information technology in your office. Many practices use a patient portal to streamline administrative functions. When patients log into the secure practice website portal using a personal user name and password, they can make requests for appointments and prescription refills, receive reminders of appointments and results from lab and other tests, and get relevant educational information. Patients like the convenience and you reduce telephone traffic.

3. CMS Economic Stimulus Incentives for EHR Utilization

In late December 2009, CMS provided details on the economic stimulus package (ARRA). There's a significant financial incentive for using electronic health records (EHR) to report quality data in a "meaningful" way. The financial stakes are high – up to $44,000/physician for Medicare over five years and up to $62,750 for Medicaid over six years.

4. Maintaining Credibility With Patients

Patients pay attention not only to clinical care, but also to the way in which you manage your practice. If your IT solutions are not current, patients may wonder about your medical knowledge.

5. Attracting the Best Medical Talent

Physicians who are either completing their training or are changing their practice situation care a great deal about the level of information technology in your practice. If IT is not a priority, you diminish your worth as well as your ability to choose the physicians you want to join your practice.

Although there are good reasons for making IT a priority for your practice, the range of responses to the potential use of IT remains wide. Some practices have decided to join forces with hospitals so they don't have to make difficult IT decisions. In practices that are not joining larger organizations, those that understand the importance of IT and have made the commitment to use it to their advantage are better positioned than those that still hope it will disappear. Nonetheless, even some of these practices are uninformed or misinformed about various financial incentives and penalties. Several of my clients proudly told me that "We will receive the federal incentive because our vendor guaranteed it." Don't confuse vendor financial incentives related to the certification of their EHR products. These are not guarantees that you as a practice will meet the requirements. They are guarantees that the vendors themselves will be certified. EHR vendors can facilitate the process of submitting information, but they don't control what you do in your office. For example, if you have chosen to keep information from different sources (e.g., lab results, scans, your own EHR) separate and don't integrate the information into a single data source or make sure that interfaces connect separate data elements, your practice may not meet the definition of "interoperability."

Practices that are sitting on the fence about IT need to wake up – there's too much at stake. If you still use paper records, lack a website with a patient portal, and/or don't use e-prescribe, you have a challenge ahead. Take the right steps in the right order to correct the situation.

1. **Make sure you are HIPAA compliant.** There's little value in enhancing your IT solutions if you don't comply with the HIPAA Privacy and Security Rules. These rules changed in 2009, so make sure you did, too.

2. **Do your homework** on the state-of-the-art of IT and on specific solutions. Contact vendors after you have some knowledge, not before. Obtain general information from several vendors, and when you know which ones offer solutions that meet your needs, give them a Request for Proposal (RFP) that contains specific questions.

3. **Make site visits, check references, and compare the responses**. Narrow your selection to two vendors, and negotiate for price.

4. Once you make your decision, make sure you are clear on the **implementation timeline and responsibilities**. Remember that IT is a tool; people make it work. Delegate the right responsibilities to the right individuals. If you need outside help, get it – early in the process.

If you've gone beyond the beginning stages and already have EHR and other IT applications in your practice, don't stop there. Qualifying for the federal money requires not only that you have the software, but that you use it in what is defined as a "meaningful" way. CMS released detailed information on December 30, 2009. Make sure you know what is says, and ask your vendor about specific plans to meet certification requirements.   Final details on certification will be available in the first quarter of 2010.

How Can We Help You?

Are you uncomfortable with or uncertain about the best IT strategy for your practice?

Satinsky Consulting, LLC can help you with IT planning and implementation in several ways:

- Assess your current IT situation to help you look at your total picture, not just individual applications.
- Recommend an appropriate IT strategy for your practice.
- Introduce you to various vendors. We're vendor neutral, so we recommend what's right for your practice, not what's in our best financial interest. Every practice is unique – in its needs, current capabilities, budget, and staff resources.
- Guide you in the selection, decision, and implementation processes.

For any of these needs or other related needs, contact Satinsky Consulting, LLC at 919 383-5998 or Margie@satinskyconsulting.com for assistance.

Upcoming Presentation on Selecting IT to Support Your Practice

April 20, 2010   "Get It Right: Strategies for Successful IT Selection and Implementation"
Georgia Medical Group Management Association
**Stone Mountain, GA**

Recently Published Articles

Visit **www.satinskyconsulting.com/publications.htm** to find these articles by Margie Satinsky:

- **"Avoiding the pitfalls when starting your own medical practice"**
  Skin and Aging • 2009

- **"Developing a website for your practice"**
  North Carolina Medical Board *Forum* • 2009

- **"Selecting Electronic Health Records and Other Technology Solutions to Support Your Practice"**
  Medical Association of Georgia Journal • 2009

- **"Developing a Website for Your Practice"**
  Skin and Aging • 2010

- **"Suggestions for Selecting Information Technology to Support Your Practice"**
  The North Carolina Family Physician • 2009

Ideas for Managing Your Practice

If you are looking for new ideas to improve your bottom line and practice operations, order **The Handbook for Medical Practice Management in the 21st Century**. The book and the companion website offer concrete suggestions and practical tools. Authored by Marjorie A. Satinsky, M.B.A., with Randall T. Curnow, Jr., M.D., M.B.A., the handbook is available from Radcliffe Press. To order the book, call 800.247.6553 or visit **www.radcliffe-oxford.com**
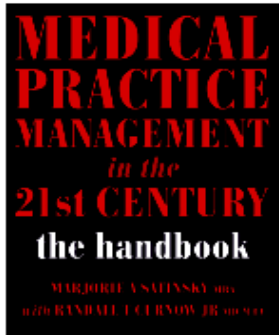
- **Dr. Mark A. Crissman of Crissman Family Practice in Graham, NC explains:**

  "What truly sets this book apart from other practice management books for physicians is that it does not stop with having developed a plan. It offers powerful, practical, and useful strategies for implementing a plan, even in established practices such as mine."

- **Here's what Dr. Robert S. Galvin, Director of Global Healthcare for General Electric (GE), says about the handbook:**

  "Medical Practice Management in the 21st Century is written for the busy practitioner – clear, concise, and practical without any wasted space. I wish I had had this resource when I was starting practice. It's the bible for practice management, just as the Washington Manual was in earlier years."

Satinsky Consulting, LLC
201 Cedar Ridge Way
Durham, NC 27705-1981
919.383.5998
Fax 919.309.0109
www.satinskyconsulting.com