



MU Advice: Be Careful with Extension Centers

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Group practices seeking advice from a federally funded Regional Extension Center should proceed with caution, advises one expert at the Medical Group Management Association. In some cases, the extension centers-ostensibly designed to facilitate group practice adoption of EHR technology-may have exclusivity deals with software vendors, says Robert Tennant, senior policy advisor at MGMA.

Not only do RECs charge for their consulting services, they may have limited options when it comes to installations, Tennant pointed out at MGMA's annual conference taking place this week in New Orleans. "Some RECs require signing with one or two vendors," he noted. "That may or may not be a good vendor" for a given practice.

Tennant also pointed out that some practices might be better off sticking with a boutique software vendor offering specialty-specific software, even those that do not receive the federal stamp of approval from a certification group. "Some specialty EHRs will never get certified, but they could boost productivity and offset the loss of any incentive money," he observed.

MGMA is working with the American Medical Association to compile an online directory of practice management system vendors, Tennant added. The online resource, available later this year, will detail features and functions of various systems. Close integration between the clinical documentation system and the practice management system will be critical moving forward, Tennant said. Hiring a consultant to help evaluate systems could be money well spent, he said. The lack of vendor manpower available to help during an installation will likely affect many practices, he said, as demand swells for EHR systems.

--Gary Baldwin

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