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Hi, it's Dr. Weitz. Thank you so much for joining me for this episode of the private medical practice Academy, trying to figure out which EMR to get is such a daunting proposition. There are so many different vendors and each one offers a myriad of options. The features fall under three different categories. In my opinion, there are the must haves. There are the really nice to haves, and then there are the probably, really don't need this, but it sounds great. So how in the world are you going to figure out which of the categories each feature falls into? If you've listened to me before, you'll know that I'm all about understanding your workflow, why?

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Because in order to choose the best product for your particular practice, you want to know which features will enable you to maximize your efficiency and productivity. Today. I want to talk to you about some of the key considerations that you're going to want to think about when you're choosing an EMR. I want to start by addressing the elephant in the room, the cost, and if you're first starting out, I'm sure that you're totally fixated on how much things cost and rightly so, as you start to look at the various software products, you'll undoubtedly notice that there's huge variability in the cost between them to make matters, worse, trying to compare features and price between them can be very difficult for me.

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The worst part is that the vendors often act like used car salesman, where the price is not really the price. And once you start to negotiate with them, things change either the price changes or what they are going to throw in changes, but it seems like smoke and mirrors or the shell game. Just remember that whatever the original offer is, you can always do better. It could be a lower price. It could be more training. It could be free months as a side note. The best time to purchase is at the end of the quarter or the end of the year. Why? Because all of these salespeople work on commission and they need to close with the highest number of possible back to the cost.

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There is no such thing as free lunch, you get what you pay for. And one of my favorite expressions, don't be penny wise and pound foolish. I've talked to a bunch of folks who've chosen the cheapest EMR available. And then they find out that the functionality and integration pieces are very limited and that in the end, they needed more staff and were less productive. Every medical practice has a set of procedures. And if you don't, you need to, but that's a whole other discussion software, which knows the order of operations for your practice and hopes, guide users through them is going to save the users time.

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It also will cut down on the training time. When you add new users, that in turn is going to decrease the amount of time that someone has to train the new user and the amount of time that it takes the new user to be productive in to that end, you're going to want to choose the EMR that is most intuitive to use. Obviously, if it's intuitive, it's going to be easy for people to adopt. Now I want to come back and say that when I tell you

that the software knows, I want you to recognize that software doesn't really know anything. Whatever it knows is because somebody taught it with machine learning. AMRs are getting smarter because the software program can quote unquote, learn over time.

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But initially someone has to tell it the initial set of rules. You don't want to get stuck in a situation where the EMR workflow is standard. And then you have to conform to it. One of the features that you'll want your EMR to have is the ability to customize your workflow. Remember that the EMR works for you and not the other way around. Here's an example of how you could customize your workflow. You can automate reminder emails for appointments, and then set reminders for phone calls to patients. You can set the parameters based on your workflow. You can see that automating these reminders can cut down on your manpower needs because the software is going to send out the emails, the texts, or the calls automatically.

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It can increase your productivity and therefore your revenue by recapturing patients that might otherwise be lost to follow up, let alone the fact that you're actually improving patient care along the same lines. You'll want to do your scheduling from within your EMR so that you can easily keep track of appointments. Now, I want you to understand that scheduling can be confusing because some of the standalone practice management software products also offer scheduling. And there are electronic appointment scheduling software options as well. So let me clear up the confusion. You unequivocally want your scheduling to be done through your EMR. That way, anytime you schedule any type of appointment or reminder, you'll have the ability to notify the patients immediately.

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You absolutely want to make sure that the scheduling feature tool can be customized to meet your practices. Specific needs. For example, a test result comes in and someone has to contact the patient to schedule an appointment, to discuss the results. If you have a customizable scheduling feature, you could send a reminder to the patient to schedule an appointment, to discuss the test result. You may even be able to have the patient go into the patient portal and schedule this appointment themselves. The key takeaway here is that the scheduling features should improve your productivity by centralizing your workflow. Next, let's talk about charting after all charting is the heart and soul of the EMR.

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When I think about EMR, all I think is click like click. As a matter of fact, many of the EMR vendors use number of keystrokes needed to complete a note as one of their compelling selling points. So of course you'll want to pay attention to how many clicks there are, but you also need to look at how many pull-down menus there are, are the pull down menus pre-populated. And if they are, are they actually populated with things that you want? Can you customize the pre-populated list? Is the software capable of learning. You're going to want to notice how many pop-up windows there are when you complete a routine note. If you click on

something, does it take you to a totally separate page for you only to have to navigate back to the main page?

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Each of these questions basically translates into a time calculation. And if you listen to my podcast episode, where I talked about cloud-based EMR, as you will recall, that if your bandwidth is inadequate, you'll be waiting for pages to load and the more pop-ups and pages that you have to go to. The longer it's going to take the bottom line is that no one wants to spend more time with their face buried in a computer than they have to. And patients complain that physicians spend so much time looking at their computer screens, that they miss significant information. If your EMR is cumbersome, you're not going to be able to actively engage with your patients. Your patient satisfaction is going to go down and you'll be charting long after the visit is over.

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One thing to recognize is that not everything that we want or need to document lends itself to a box that you can simply click on. I can tell you firsthand that there will undoubtedly be times that you will want to add freestyle comments to your note. And if you're a hunt and pecker, like my husband you'll want an EMR that has the ability to dictate directly into the document when you were evaluating the different products, be sure to look at which fields you can actually dictate into. For example, can you dictate the entire HPI or plan freestyle, or can you only add a comment to a specific box? Templates can definitely speed up the charting process, but not all templates are easily customizable.

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Being able to customize a template and make it your own is a feature that you're absolutely going to want to have. Look, no two practices are exactly the same. So the ability to create your own template to match your needs is going to increase your productivity. Understand that if you save your own frequently used information, when you see patients with similar diagnoses, you speed up your entire workflow. Remember when I was talking about software being smart earlier in this episode, the gold standard in EMR charting utilizes machine learning. Instead of having to customize the template with guesses about the information you'll need to take down. Some EMR is, are actually capable of learning from the information you have recorded the order in which you recorded it.

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And which information generally goes with which other information, the result your forums become increasingly more useful and streamlined as you go. This is another great example of how understanding your workflow and practice needs will help you to choose a tool that in turn is going to make you more efficient, productive, and profitable. You'll also want the EMR to allow you to chart on multiple types of devices, including a tablet so that you have the flexibility of charting where you want. And as a side note, you'll also want to have programmable keyboard shortcuts in order to save charting time. Next, your EMR

software should offer e-prescribing of course you want to be able to print and transmit prescriptions electronically, but you also want immediate and automatic notifications of potential drug allergies and interactions.

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Some EMR have more robust e-prescribing capabilities than others. Some of them have an e-prescribing feature that is native to the system while others have essentially, what is a plugin, some of the questions you're going to want to ask the EMR vendor include which database or databases does your EMR use to find drug interactions? Does the software offer two way communication with pharmacies? What percentage of pharmacies are available to patients as a hint? Not all the Amar's come preloaded with the same list of pharmacies. You'll also want to ask if the software integrates with Medicare part D and does the system offer easily printed medication handouts?

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Obviously the ability to send prescriptions authorized refills and directly communicate with pharmacies are great features, but one of the most important things you're going to want the EMR to do is to be able to track medications, notify you if there's any potential interaction and suggest an alternative. If there is one now on to one of the key features that I personally think is a must have look, coding is definitely one of those things that stresses everybody out. And now that the coding rules have completely changed, a lot of docs are scrambling to understand how to code. There are AMRs that are out there that can help you comply with ENM documentation standards.

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Here's a list of the information that you're going to want your EMR to be able to record the reason for the encounter and the relevant history, the physical exam findings prior diagnostic test results, assessment, clinical impression, and diagnoses, and the plan of care. And you're thinking to yourself, of course, it should be recording all of this, but here is one of my favorite features that can really make life better for you and the EMR that can suggest an ENM code based on your documentation. Now, let me be crystal clear. The EMR can not code for you, but it can suggest which code is appropriate. In some of the more sophisticated EMR is can actually suggest what additional information would be needed to be able to code for a higher level of service.

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I think these features are particularly valuable in being able to defend your coding and not being subjected to down coding. If you ask me confidence in coding is worth its weight in gold, it'll pay you dividends way above what you pay for the AMR. So don't cheat yourself here. Next. I want to talk about lab integration. If you have a lab dependent practice, you're going to want an EMR that is able to seamlessly electronically monitor the delivery analysis and the results of samples. Here are some of the things that you're going to want to look for. Number one, which lab or labs does the software integrate with? Usually it's the big labs like LabCorp

and quest, but you may utilize other labs.

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And you want to know whether this can be integrated into the software. Is there a two-way communication between you and the lab, and is there easy access to explanations for the lab results? If your practice orders and reviews is significant amount of imaging, you're going to want to ask the same questions for integration with imaging centers. In this case, it's not so much the group per se, but really the PAC system that the imaging center is using. You want to be sure that the software is capable of automatically adding results into the patient's chart. This is going to save you and your staff a tremendous amount of time by not having to manually enter each lab or imaging result.

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Also, if your patient's results come back and they're abnormal in any way, then most AMRs are going to immediately be able to notify you on the screen or some type of banner. That's going to pop up. If your EMR has a patient portal, then they usually will allow your patient to access their lab results. As soon as they're ready, a good lab integration will not only make communication between you and the lab. Easier. It should display the results in an easy to read format, so that they're easy for both you and the patient to understand this piece is essential so that the patients aren't blowing up your phones or your inbox with questions.

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You've heard me talk about a patient portal several times. Now let's talk about why you need one. Do you know what's better than serving patients? Patients serving themselves. Patient portals are great way to help educate patients and give them a platform to exchange information. However, the caveat is that you need to have a great, easy to use portal in order to convince patients to actually use it. And it should provide a secure login for patients and then allow them to access educational materials forms, to sign or download lab results, information from their last visit with you, a list of their allergies and medications, recent doctor visits, or discharge summaries, and the ability to request a prescription.

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Personally, I think that one of the most important things a patient portal can provide is the ability to schedule appointments by encouraging your patients, to book their appointments online, you can reduce the number of phone calls that your office gets and improve your workflow. Additionally, it gives patients a centralized place where all of their medical information is kept and updated. Something to keep in mind is that the portal has to be easy to use and really provide a benefit for the patient in order to convince them to use the patient portal. I also want to tell you that some of the EMR will even let you customize the portal so that you can share newsletters, preventative care, recalls, and other targeted health promotions.

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Essentially it can become an extension of your marketing program. If you utilize it. All of the features I've

talked about are designed to improve your workflow. Here's the takeaway, the number one EMR feature that you want is flexibility to customize your EMR and make it work for you. However you want to use it wherever you want to use. It is invaluable. Look, medicine is dynamic. There's always something new. Whether it's a disease, you don't commonly see a new procedure, a new drug, new coding rules. The list goes on. It's ever changing. You need an EMR that is going to adapt to whatever changes and in the long run, it will ultimately cost you less money for your EMR while improving your efficiency, productivity, and ultimately your profitability.

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Thanks for joining me, be sure to sign up for my newsletter below, and I'll be sending you tips on how to start your practice best run your practice, grow the practice, and then ultimately be able to leverage your medical practice into multiple other businesses. I hope to see you soon.