

How physicians are helping rethink EHRs

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Dreaming of a day when your electronic health record (EHR) system actually communicates with other systems? You're not alone—doctors across the country are frustrated. Physician involvement in a special group of health IT leaders could help solve the problem.

With its recent involvement in the Substitutable Medical Applications and Reusable Technology (SMART) Platforms project, the AMA is embedding the voice of physicians in efforts to make EHRs work better for physicians and patients.

Improving technology

A key component of the SMART project is the development of an infrastructure that allows for free, open development of plug-and-play apps. Such apps are intended to increase cost-effective interoperability between health technology, including EHRs.

"It is important that physicians are involved throughout the development process to ensure new health technologies fully live up to their potential to enhance care and increase safety and efficiency," said Jesse M. Ehrenfeld, MD, member of the AMA Board of Trustees and newly named member of the SMART project advisory committee.

"The SMART project has the potential to improve technology usability and utility for both patients and physicians, which would improve health outcomes and quality while driving down costs," Dr. Ehrenfeld said.

A fundamental shift in health IT

The project began after a 2009 paper in the *New England Journal of Medicine* proposed a fundamental shift in the health IT marketplace—reimagining health IT as a smartphone-like platform

that can run substitutable apps. This approach has the ability to accelerate innovation that can accommodate differences in care work flow, drive down health tech costs and foster competition in the marketplace.

If an EHR vendor used some of the SMART project's suggestions, it would help that system achieve many of the functionalities included in the AMA's framework for improving EHR usability. Priorities in that framework include improving care coordination, increasing product modularity and configurability, facilitating digital and mobile patient engagement, and promoting data liquidity.

Involvement in the SMART project is just one way the AMA is working to make physicians heard when it comes to health IT. The association's recent collaboration with MATTER, a Chicago-based health tech incubator, gives physicians and tech entrepreneurs a space to interact. Future collaborations between physicians and patients at MATTER will include workshops, simulations and the "exam room of the future," which will be built in the AMA's Interaction Studio at the facility.

Improved health IT is a piece of the AMA's initiative on professional satisfaction and practice sustainability. Through this initiative, physicians are calling for overhauled EHRs. It's also the basis for STEPS Forward, a new online series of proven solutions developed by physicians to help practices thrive. Educational modules help doctors address a range of common practice challenges, including selecting an EHR vendor and implementing an EHR system.