

4 smart strategies to tame the EHR and cut physician burnout

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Half of the physician's day is spent in the EHR and desk work, while more than one-third of time with patients is spent on nonclinical tasks. On top of that, physicians are doing one to two hours of extra work each day, including long hours before and after clinic completing "between visit" work.

But with the help of the AMA STEPS Forward[®] "Taming the Electronic Health Record Playbook," physician practices and health care organizations can learn how to rein in the EHR workload and cut down on physician "pajama time."

"The EHR burden is a major contributor to physician burnout, and it has become a problem that individual physicians cannot fix on their own," the playbook says. "It is imperative for organizations to learn how to 'tame' the EHR by implementing effective team-based care principles and responding to feedback for continuous system-level improvement."

This playbook highlights AMA STEPS Forward open-access toolkits, which offer innovative strategies that allow physicians and their teams to thrive in the new health care environment. These toolkits can help prevent physician burnout, create the organizational foundation for joy in medicine and improve practice efficiency.

Reducing physician burnout is a core element of the AMA Recovery Plan for America's Physicians. You took care of the nation. It's time for the nation to take care of you. It's time to rebuild. And the AMA is ready.

Far too many American physicians experience burnout. That's why the AMA develops resources that prioritize well-being and highlight workflow changes so physicians can focus on what matters—patient care.

Here are four strategies organizations can implement to tame the EHR and free up physician time.

Stop the unnecessary work

To eliminate unnecessary work, start with the AMA STEPS Forward de-implementation checklist (PDF). Many of the tactics can be accomplished within weeks or even days. Think about what should never enter the inbox before trying to find the time to empty it.

This is also a good opportunity to use the “Getting Rid of Stupid Stuff” toolkit to help get rid of unnecessary work.

Share the necessary work

“After optimal de-implementation to reduce unnecessary work, at the end of the day, there is still much necessary work to be accomplished in the EHR,” the playbook says. “The key here is involving the entire care team to share this workload—this is essential for effectively taming the EHR.”

For managing the EHR, the core team-based care workflows include:

- EHR inbox management.
- Patient portal optimization.
- Annual prescription renewal and medication alignment.
- Pre-visit planning and pre-visit labs.
- Team documentation.

Additionally, the “EHR Inbox Management” toolkit offers a summary of strategies for sharing, delegating and improving team based EHR workflows.

Optimize personal EHR proficiency

This third strategy will help physicians boost their confidence and morale from the outset with easy wins. These are small changes that add up to big effects and can save hours each week. It will also help enhance EHR skills with efficiency-boosting that were developed by experts.

Gather data

It is essential to gather accurate and up-to-date EHR use data to measure progress. Gathering data can also help in identifying areas of continued focus for an organization. In this section, organizations will learn how to tame the EHR by establishing key use metrics. They will also learn how to leverage EHR data to both identify areas of need and track improvement and progress.

As part of its commitment to improving the use of EHRs for physicians, the AMA Practice Transformation EHR Use Research Grant program funds to researchers across the nation. Since 2020, the AMA has provided nearly \$1.4 million in grant funding to researchers, with the 2022 cohort awarded more than \$500,000. Visit the AMA Practice Transformation webpage and click on the “Research” tab to learn more.