3 key insights for medical students honing their EHR capabilities

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Medical students approaching their clinical training are certain to interact with the EHR. How can they thrive with it early on?

A series of modules—the AMA EHR Workflow Learning Series—aims to prepare medical students to leverage any electronic health record system to improve their efficiency and effectiveness as they gain increasing responsibility in medical practices. The content is available via the AMA Ed Hub™.

Nadia Ismail, MD, is one of the series’ co-authors.

“These modules focus on the overall system and flow of information. They help learners to be more efficient and more engaged, which is central to physician and providing patient care in the EHR,” said Dr. Ismail, an AMA member. She is vice dean and associate professor at Baylor College of Medicine.

The series covers areas such as “how to do morning rounds, how to respond to abnormal vital signs. These are the types of tasks that help you improve efficiency and ultimately patient care.”

For students preparing for their first days of EHR usage, Dr. Ismail offered a few key insights.

Understand your arena

Students often have an advantage mastering the technical aspects of the EHR since they are digital natives. While mastering the technical aspects may come more quickly to medical students learning the EHR, systems-based knowledge will be a deficit. Doing as much as you can to learn about the health system in which you are working, Dr. Ismail said, will be helpful in your EHR usage.

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“The ability to engage and utilize technology is not typically a challenge for students,” she said. “The challenge is understanding and navigating the health system so they can efficiently provide patient care in that system.”

“As an example, the system at a VA can be very different from the one at a private hospital,” Dr. Ismail noted.

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**Get your bearings**

Before a medical student engages with the EHR in the clinical arena, there is often training on the system’s functionality from a vendor or affiliate. Beyond that, residents and physicians should be able to help you. Sometimes it helps to poke around on your own as well. “It’s important to know how to navigate the platform and know where to find and enter information,” Dr. Ismail said. “It’s knowing how to not just extract information but where and how to enter it. For learners knowing where and how to utilize order sets and note templates will improve efficiency and workflow.”

Learn how medical students can improve their BP-measurement techniques.

**There are a lot of cooks in the kitchen**

The EHR touches so many different aspects of a patient’s care. Learning who is responsible for what is a key to effective EHR usage. “When we say workflow, it is about understanding there are different members of the team responsible for different components of information in the chart, and it's important for students to understand on a systems-based level because that is critical for patient care,” Dr. Ismail said. “Specifically, understanding who’s entering what and when, and how to communicate findings and important information through the chart—such as with sticky notes.

“Everyone from the chaplain to the social worker to the nutritionist is putting information in the EHR that's readily accessible at all times.”

The EHR modules are part of the AMA Undergraduate Curricular Enrichment Program. The program features more than two dozen online modules to keep medical students on track in three key areas: health systems science, medical student leadership, and EHR workflow.