



How to **choose** the right clinical practice management system

A Best Practices Approach

By Debra Lindell, Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, CEO, Empathic Clinical Software LLC

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“ Wouldn't it be great if we in the behavioral health community ”
could eliminate as much as 87% of the administrative burden
that so greatly tasks us today?

What if we could also streamline our billing practices, access all of our critical financial information at the touch of a keypad, and also get paid quicker by insurance companies?

What if we had a silent partner, a very smart albeit unseen, partner who collaborated with us in running our practices more efficiently and effectively? A partner that assumed responsibility for making sure all the onerous, yet essential compliance-related tasks – such as filling out, submitting & tracking claims reimbursement forms, handling appointment schedules, maintaining patient charts and even researching & confirming diagnostic codes by searching the DSM IV-TR—all according to the requirements of the business?

All of those things are here today! They come embedded in a few select, highly advanced clinical practice management software programs designed for the behavioral health community.

To help you sort through the torrent of information surrounding clinical practice management software solutions, we at Empathic Clinical Software have compiled an overview of what constitutes “best practices” in the field. This information is intended to help individual

behavioral therapists and group clinic managers get a better grasp on what's involved in choosing a best-in-class Electronic Medical Record (EMR) -based clinical Practice Management Solution (PMS) – one that can make your business run more smoothly, efficiently, and profitably, than ever before.

Automation Should Make Life Easier

Automation should be designed to make life easier and more manageable for people. It's as true with today's most advanced clinical practice management solutions as it is with any other technological product. In our world of behavioral health care, choices abound for automating the mundane minutiae, such as bookkeeping and patient record-keeping, entailed in running a successful practice. Some are more extensive and fully-featured than others, and some are more integrated with other aspects of managing a clinical practice, such as providing a seamless route to the looming future of government-mandated Electronic Medical Records.

As you dive into the world of EMRs and PMS systems – or if you're contemplating a change from what you currently have in place – you will naturally want to inform yourself about what's available to you.

“ The best solution is the one that marries the two functions: ”
EMR capabilities and a robust-featured practice management
solution into one fully integrated platform.

Look For Integration

All this talk of EMRs and PMS systems can be confusing, How many acronyms does it take to get the system you need? For most, the best solution is the one that marries the two functions – EMR capabilities and a robust-featured practice management solution – into one fully integrated platform. Sound radical? It’s really not. It’s just a matter of getting two distinct but closely related software programs to talk and share data with each other. Leave it to the computer programmers to figure that one out – and they have. From a user perspective, this is ideal, because all you have to do is enter data once – and the computer program is smart enough to know what parts of that data should be shared with your EMR functions, and vice versa.

Lose The Paperwork & Gain Peace Of Mind

How can a first-rate EMR/PMS work to your advantage, both to ensure that you are compliant with governmental regulations and mandates (although that’s no small feat in itself), and to spur you on to greater success as a therapist?

The most obvious advantage comes in the form of reduced paperwork – or to put it more positively, an upgrade in terms of your ability to better organize your practice. Storing documents electronically via a secure, cloud-based system, certainly beats having to maintain bulky paper files. Couple that with the ability to easily manage all important details of your practice – from scheduling to patient charting, legal and ethical compliance documentation, bookkeeping and billing – anywhere, anytime, from any computer with Internet access. The hours and dollars you save can be very significant.

Real-Time Diagnostic Tools

But the best in class EMR/PMS systems do much more than simply eliminate paperwork. Some can actually serve as your informal business assistant. Imagine what it’s like to type, or speak, your patient and case notes into the computer – or to even download a digital recording of your notes, and let the computer software compile a transcript for you – knowing that your faithful electronic partner is following right along with your every thought. Smart PMS technology enables the software program to understand and interpret your notes based on a semantic search of the entire 1,400-page DMS IV-TR. Such a program can parse the meaning of your notes, even if they are only in rambling order, and present recommended diagnostic codes for your consideration.

It’s still your call, of course, as to which diagnoses are most appropriate. Once you’ve made your coding selections, you can instruct the program to automatically fill in the relevant claims reimbursement form that declares itself on-screen. Once completed, you review the form for accuracy, and with another keystroke or so, transmit that form electronically to the insurance company. A few weeks later, assuming all goes as planned, the insurance company deposits the approved reimbursement into your bank account and payments post automatically to your clients account! Sound science fiction-like? Not at all. This is the current state of the art of the best-in-class PMS solutions now available to the behavioral therapy community.

“ Poor interface design that detracts from clinician efficiency and affinity for the [EMR] system will likely lead to underuse or misuse of the system. ”

according to the Institute of Medicine's November 2011 report, "Health IT and Patient Safety: Building Safer Systems for Better Care."
Lack of usability is a potential cause of errors in using EMRs, according to the report.

An Extremely Intuitive Interface

No PMS solution, at least none with multiple advanced features of the kind that can truly make you wonder how you ever lived without it, comes without some kind of learning curve attached. But a good system should be able to be learned so that you can drive it on your own, without aid of an instructor, with a minimal amount of online training. Certainly you will want to think twice before investing in a system that involves a long and arduous training period prior to implementation. Four to eight hours would be my recommendation for the maximum range of training time to consider before launching into the system on your own.

Best-in-class PMS solutions today are so well designed that even first-time users feel confident operating the system. That's because the best systems are full-featured ones, delivering benefits such as reduced administrative work, better patient care, and the all-important government mandated compliance standards such as HIPAA requires and the soon-to-be required electronic medical record. They are also custom-tailored to the specific needs, experiences and expectations of therapists. Isn't that refreshing to know? Even better, are the feelings of exhilaration and rejuvenation that therapists experience when they discover how fast, efficient and effective they've become at running the business side of their practices.

Integration With External Payers

You don't have to sacrifice benefits in order to get the benefits of ease-of-use either. In fact, in today's digital world, you find that the best technological products – think Apple Computer – are those combining state-

of-the-art technology features with a user interface that is friendly and intuitive enough for even the most computer-phobic individual to feel comfortable using.

Ease of use is certainly not the only factor to consider when investing in a clinical practice management solution. You want to make sure that the program also delivers other benefits important to elevating your practice as well. For example, look carefully to see how extensive the software provider's system meshes electronically with the claims reimbursement processes of external payers such as insurance companies and government agencies.

Compliance! Compliance! Compliance!

Government compliance issues are a major factor in choosing a practice management solution today. Not all practice management solutions are created equal in this case either. For example, complying with HIPAA requirements means that all patient-related data stored electronically must be securely encrypted both when in transit – as when being transmitted electronically across the Internet or a company intranet – and at rest. The "at rest" part is where some systems fail to meet the standard. A state-of-the-art system automatically encrypts data so that it is in full HIPAA compliance as it is entered and stored by you. It is no longer HIPAA compliant to have private health information on your computer if it's not encrypted. Penalties for failure to comply with HIPAA standards can be severe, to the point where they can financially "break" a practice. It can be short-sighted indeed to go with a system that does not help you achieve full HIPAA compliance with regard to data security.

Know Your True Costs

What about costs? How much does it cost you now, to spend time working on non-reimbursable administrative tasks? Or how much do you pay to have someone do your billing, claims and accounting, transcribing? A quality PMS solution will enable you to “recover” many of those hours currently lost to administration – hours that can be used to build the practice, see more clients, bring in more revenues. If that’s the case, then you may well be able to more than recoup the cost of your subscription to a quality PMS system by increasing your profitability and/or reducing staff or external professional expenses. Of course, you could also spend those extra hours with your family, or pursuing educational opportunities, or traveling the world – more time to spend on the things that matter most to you.

Interestingly though, even the so-called high end, integrated EMR products in the behavioral health industry are priced nowhere near the levels of similar products for the general medical industry. (Or for what you would pay someone to do the work for you)

Knowledgeable, Accessible Support

One final point: The software world abounds with horror stories about poor customer service. Vendors will sell you a product, one that is inherently complicated, promising you that help is always at hand. That may not be the case however. Some companies out-source their customer service departments to off-shore call centers, staffed by employees who may not have the necessary expertise to handle your inquiries. What the best companies offer is true, person-to-person communication – where you can call and talk to a real person who is knowledgeable about the system you are using and who can provide expert assistance. Those companies are best suited to help you work through a difficulty you may be having in submitting a claim to an insurance company, or help you handle a specific issue you may be having with the software.

Dealing With Your Comfort Zone

Some of us prefer to stay within our customary comfort zones and do things the way we’ve always done them – maintaining patient charts with pencil-and-paper tools, cluttering our offices with bulky metal filing cabinets that we then fill up with bulky paper files, mailing out client invoices and claims reimbursement forms. Running our businesses, in other words, as if the information age never happened!

But the information age is literally knocking on our doors! In just a few short years, a virtual industry of clinical practice management software solutions providers has emerged, with seemingly dozens of companies clamoring for our attention with claims that their products will solve all of our practice management problems and put us on the road to full compliance with all of the sticky government-orchestrated and mandated administrative tasks we must perform in order to stay in business.

Get All The Benefits You Deserve

Choosing the correct practice management software system for your practice can be a daunting task. But the benefits of using a first-rate software solution are many. It can literally transform your practice by:

- 1 Eliminating so much of the drudgery of administrative work that weighs practitioners down.
- 2 Streamlining your billing processes, help you deal more effectively with insurers and helping third party payers (and get paid faster and with fewer bounce-backs). Empower you to take complete charge of the financial aspects of running a successful practice.
- 3 Freeing you from the worry over whether your data is HIPAA compliant – and prepare you to be in compliance with the EMR mandate looming on the horizon.
- 4 By helping revitalize your spirit and bolster your enthusiasm for your true work -- that of being a wonderful therapist dedicated to helping patients solve their life problems.

Why Empathic Clinical Software is the Smart Choice for Behavioral Health Clinics.

First developed and launched to the behavioral health market in 2009, Empathic Clinical Software is a fully integrated package of tools designed to make life easier and more profitable for the individual practitioner and group practice manager. The key features of Empathic are:

- ✔ Automated Agenda with Clinical and Practice Management Alerts
- ✔ Centralized Patient Scheduling
- ✔ Clinical Notes from Intake through Summary of Closure
- ✔ HIPAA Documents, Releases of Information, Informed Consent and other legal and ethical requirements
- ✔ Financial Center: Digital Billing and Claims Processing
- ✔ Integrated DSM IV-TR database, works alongside therapist's notes to direct diagnostic coding
- ✔ Secure encryption of patient data, in transit and at rest, for full HIPAA compliance
- ✔ Built-in electronic medical record functionality.

“ Just as Apple defined the smartphone, Empathic is defining smart behavioral health software. ”

Visit www.empathic.com or call 952-473-6200
today for a FREE Demo



For more information on Empathic Clinical Software, visit the company website at www.empathic.com or call the company headquarters at 952-473-6200. Empathic is located at 700 Twelve Oaks Center Drive, Suite 204, Wayzata, Minn. 55391.

ABOUT DEBRA LINDELL: Debra Lindell, a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, created the Empathic Clinical Software system specifically “so clinicians can do what they were trained to do, without having to learn another thing. Over 1 million behavioral health providers in the United States spend an increasing amount of time on administrative and compliance tasks (and less on providing needed therapy) just to get paid...(with Empathic) the work clinicians did not sign up for is done behind the scenes while they are sleeping. That’s why I named the company ‘Empathic’. It means, ‘I feel your pain’ and our goal was to eliminate that pain.”