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Physical Therapy Software Buyer's Guide

The frustration and resentment have built; your walls are up, and you're starting to pull away. At this point, you know it's not you; it's your subpar software solution that's the problem. You've tried everything in your power to make the workflow better—Band-Aid fixes, cumbersome workarounds, extra IT personnel—but nothing has helped. The system simply is no longer meeting your needs. Maybe it never did.

So, now what? Unlike a situation with an actual romantic love interest, you may not be able to break up with your current electronic medical record (EMR) system until you find a replacement—which means it's time to shop around. Before you cast your net for something better, though, you've got to have a solid idea of what to look for. **You already know exactly what you don't want in your software**; this guide will outline what you do want—and how to get it.

1. Identify your system and business requirements.

Before you shop for your new system, audit your current processes to identify your business and system requirements. Here are some questions to consider:

- How many staff members do you have—and will every employee need access to the system? How many employees will need to clinically document, and how many will need administrative access only?

- With what systems will your EMR need to integrate?

- What types of devices (phones, tablets, desktops) will you use to access your software?

- Are you happy with your current billing software or service—or is now a good time to shop around for a new billing vendor, too?

- How fast do you expect your business to grow? Will your EMR be able to support your growth in terms of training and system bandwidth?

- Does your clinic currently use—or want to use—an online intake form for patient registration?

- What scheduling functionality is important to your staff?

- Is outcomes tracking important to you? (Given the current pay-for-performance state of health care, we're betting you're looking for a software that helps you demonstrate—and track—the impact of your services.)

2. Ask the right questions—and don't settle for anything less than the right answers.

Once you have a list of your system and business requirements, start querying companies. As you do, here are several questions (organized by category) that you'll want to answer about any potential software system you're considering:

Ease of Use

Is it web-based?

Be sure that your web-based software is truly web-based—as opposed to web-enabled. The latter may seem comparable, but it's not, because these systems still require you to manage all future software updates and secure your patients' protected health information (PHI). Plus, you'll want a solution that you and your staff can access from phone, tablet, or desktop computer—and one that's browser agnostic, which simply means it runs on any up-to-date browser (e.g., Safari, Chrome, and Firefox).

Is it reliable?

The best EMR vendors pride themselves on uptime rates above 99%. Don't settle for prolonged downtime when you could be working with a system that anticipates—and adjusts for—your needs. And while we're on the subject of reliability, you also want to be sure your new software is backed by a reliable company—so you can rest easy knowing it'll be around for the long haul. Thus, pay special attention to solvency cues, such as a well-designed website, up-to-date content, regular press releases announcing company updates and growth milestones, and positive reviews from other users.

Is it secure?

Look for a vendor that uses the SSL encryption that is standard for all online banking applications and offers unique user IDs and passwords—an absolute must for anything online. Two more must-haves: a vendor that has an audit trail (i.e., user activity tracking) as well as specialized staff who are well-versed in online security measures and always at the ready to provide you with expertise.

Is it built for PTs?

Be on the lookout for a system that tailors its software to address the specific needs of practicing physical therapists, not generic providers—and certainly not physicians. A software that offers customizable evaluations and Smart Text—a feature that allows you to save and reenter phrases you use frequently—will help you further streamline your documentation flow.

Furthermore, no matter what you've heard, you don't need your physical therapy software to be Meaningful Use-certified. Under the **American Recovery and Reinvestment Act** (ARRA), physical therapists aren't considered eligible professionals, which means you cannot earn the incentive. Furthermore, Meaningful Use-certified vendors are tailoring their systems to providers who are considered eligible—such as physicians—which means you'll end up paying for an expensive system that's designed for another profession's needs.

Does it offer free support and training?

Choose an EMR that provides expert customer support and training—and top-notch educational content in a variety of mediums (in-person, online, text, and video)—for free.

Tired of shopping around? WebPT is everything you want in your physical therapy software.

Request a complimentary tour today.

Powerful Features

Does it have built-in compliance tools and alerts?

Compliance must-haves include **functional limitation reporting**, **8-minute rule** monitoring, and **therapy cap** tracking—all built right into your documentation software. Additionally, in terms of ICD-10, your new software should do the following:

- ✓ **Provide free ICD-10 training, support, and resources**.

- ✓ Maintain a complete library of ICD-9 and ICD-10 codes (some payers, like auto and workers compensation carriers, still use ICD-9).

- ✓ Base its ICD-10 code library on more than **general equivalence mappings (GEMs)**. (In other words, steer clear of any EMR that claims to have automatic crosswalking.)

- ✓ Prompt you to document specific details of every patient's injury or issue.

- ✓ Suggest a more specific code when one exists.

- ✓ Alert you when you've selected an invalid or unbillable code.

Does it offer integrated billing options?

Look for a practice management solution that offers an EMR as well as billing service (a.k.a. revenue cycle management or RCM) and integrated software options. But, steer clear of any practice management solution that gives you pieces of its software at no cost (for example: if you pay for the RCM service, you get the EMR documentation portion for free). "You get what you pay for" has never been more applicable than it is in this scenario.

Will it turn your data into business intelligence?

Your new physical therapy software should analyze your data and present it to you in the form of meaningful, impactful, and intuitive reports (a.k.a. business intelligence). That way, you can:

- ✓ Monitor staff productivity and audit activity.

- ✓ Track and identify lost patients—including cancellations and no-shows—as well as clinic billing information such as claim status and units billed.

- ✓ Manage patient notes to ensure patients' plans of care are always up to date.

- ✓ Assess clinic compliance by reviewing easy-to-understand reports, including a Medicare therapy cap report, which shows patients' progression toward the cap.

- ✓ Review the impact of your marketing efforts through referral tracking and reporting.

Does it have tools for the front office?

Choose a system that enables you to embed a customizable—and branded—intake form into your website for patients to complete prior to their first office visit. Additionally, make sure your new software handles:

Scheduling

- ✓ Booking, changing, and removing patient appointments

- ✓ Setting recurring patient appointments and meetings

- ✓ Dragging and dropping to reschedule appointments

- ✓ Tracking no-shows and cancellations

- ✓ Seeing multiple therapists' calendars in one view with color coding

- ✓ Creating calendars for rooms or machines that require reservations

- ✓ Monitoring Medicare patients' progress toward the therapy cap within appointment entries

Automated Appointment Reminders

- ✓ Sending automatic appointment reminders to patients via text, email, or phone

- ✓ **Reducing no-shows by as much as 30%**

- ✓ Relieving front office staff from having to perform time-consuming patient calls

- ✓ Increasing patient engagement with professional reminders

- ✓ Uploading external documents (like diagnostic images, patient-signed consent forms, physician referrals, and prescriptions) directly into your patients' records

- ✓ Creating an online archive of information on each patient that anyone on your team can access

- ✓ Faxing and emailing patient notes directly from the system

Industry Empowerment

Will it scale?

Only consider software solutions that offer flexible pricing that scales with your business's growth. For example, per-user pricing is preferable to per-chart pricing, because per-chart pricing forces you to pay based on patient volume. In other words, you're penalized for growing—and that's a darn shame.

Does the company respect your business—and your data?

Don't fall prey to any company that locks you into a restrictive contract and won't allow you to access your data in the event that you choose to leave. Instead, choose a software vendor that respects you and your data, which means it has a stellar product that's continually evolving based on customer-feedback; features zero long-term contracts; and doesn't harbor any silly notions about data ownership rights. That way, you can access your data anytime you please.

Does it track patient outcomes data?

Choose an EMR solution that allows you to complete (and track the results of) outcome measurement tools directly within your documentation. **Your platform** should even generate **easy-to-read reports** that tell you how your clinic is performing at the individual therapist level, the regional level, and the national level. That way, you'll be able to assess and fine-tune your own clinical processes and approaches to ensure you're always providing the **best possible care**. More than that, though, you'll be able to prove your value to payers, referring providers, and healthcare consumers using cold, hard facts.

Will it save you money on clinical supplies?

There's power in numbers, and if your physical therapy software solution has one of the largest PT communities in the country, then you have access to a whole host of perks and benefits, including big discounts—think 25% off of wholesale prices—on the physical therapy products you need to run your practice.

Does the company's leadership team advocate for PTs?

- **Take a closer look at the leadership team guiding your physical therapy software**. Is a PT in charge? Is he or she:

  ◦ actively involved in the industry—speaking as a thought leader on the topics that matter to you and advocating for the future of your profession?

  ◦ a member of the APTA—or involved with any industry boards or organizations?

  ◦ respected as a leader within the community?

  ◦ dedicated to providing educational content in the form of free **articles**, **blogs**, **webinars**, and **guides** about topics that are crucial to you and your industry?

The more "yesses" to these questions, the better. Your new practice management software should be run by a thought leader who's passionate about the rehab therapy industry and its providers. After all, that passion will flow right into your physical therapy software.

Looking for that special something that sets your physical therapy software apart from the rest? We've got it.

Request a tour here.

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3. Get buy-in from internal stakeholders.

You want the best physical therapy software on the market (the one that checks all your boxes). And you've done your research, so you know which solutions are in the running for the top contender. But whether or not you're the decision-maker, you may need to get buy-in from other internal stakeholders to make this desire a reality. Here are a few tips for ensuring everyone in your clinic is on board:

Focus on the benefits.

You already know the plethora of amazing features that the right physical therapy software provides—everything from intuitive and customizable initial evaluations specifically designed to meet the needs of rehab therapists to seamlessly integrated Medicare compliance alerts, reporting, and tracking. But, you'll need to know more than that; you'll need to know exactly how your new physical therapy solution can actually solve a real problem (or several) that your clinic is facing. Instead of rattling off a list of features that will end up going in one ear and out the other, make the case for how the solution you want to switch to will address a specific pain point—something that's keeping whomever you're trying to convince up at night.

Let's look at an example.

Pain point: Your clinic has been suffering from missed appointments that are impacting the bottom line—and your front office staff doesn't have the time or bandwidth to call every patient and confirm every appointment.

How to address it: Explain that the new system offers automatic appointment reminders (via phone, email, or text), which reduce no-shows and cancellations by **as much as 30%**.

- If you're talking to the person crunching the numbers, you'll want to focus on the money the clinic will be able to recoup via patient payments and insurance reimbursements now that a greater number of patients are showing up for their appointments.

- If you're talking to the front office team who has been trying to fit calling patients to confirm appointments into their already-busy schedule, you'll want to focus on how much more time—and less stress—they'll have when the system automates this task, thus removing it from their scope of work altogether.

Can't you feel the sighs of relief? The same process applies no matter your clinic's pain points. Find where it hurts, and provide the salve—one of the system's numerous benefits—to make it better.

Be ready to overcome objections.

Change can be tough—and if your clinic has already invested time and money into your existing system, it could be challenging to get the team on board with switching to another. And understandably so, because the prospect of starting the process all over again can seem daunting—especially if getting up and running on your last system was nothing short of a nightmare. However, you know the truth: a new system that actually works for your clinic will make everyone's lives better—including your patients'. And software adoption doesn't actually have to be all that difficult. Sure, it's going to take some time and effort to get up to speed on a new platform, but if you're moving to an easy-to-use and intuitive system that offers an excellent training program, the learning curve will be completely manageable—and so worth it.

Just be patient as everyone else comes to see the benefits that you do. Keep a calm demeanor, and stick to the facts—that's the best way to overcome whatever objections you may face. And whatever you do, don't take these objections personally, and don't over-promise. Honesty really is the best policy.

Stay positive and confident.

While we certainly don't recommend sugar-coating everything—or anything, for that matter—about the new system and the upcoming transition, we do strongly suggest staying positive and remaining confident. You've stepped up as an advocate for change, which means your team is going to look to you for direction on how to feel about what's coming. The best way to reassure them that what you're proposing is actually a good idea is to remain positive and confident, which should be easy considering how much research and due diligence you've done throughout the whole process.

Wondering how to position a potential new software solution in a way that'll have the most positive impact possible? Call up your contact at the software company. He or she should be well-versed in the benefits and happy to help you create a customized communication strategy to foster the buy-in you need to move forward.

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Buyer's Guide Questionnaire

Here's a checklist of the questions you should ask potential software vendors. Feel free to print this out and keep it with you while you're speaking to vendor representatives.

Is the software web-based?

- Is the system accessible via phone, tablet, and desktop?
- Is it browser agnostic?

Is it reliable?

- What's your uptime percentage? (Be sure it's at least 99%.)
- What's your customer retention rate?
- What are people saying about your company?
- How long have you been in business?
- How much is the company growing—internally and externally?

Is it secure?

- Where will you store my practice's data?
- What kind of encryption does the software use? (Be sure it's SSL.)
- Will each user have a unique username and password?
- Do you have an audit trail (i.e., user activity tracking)?
- Are specialized staff who are well-versed in online security measures available if I have questions?

Is it built for PTs?

- Does it match a physical therapist's workflow?
- Does it include Smart Text and the ability to customize evaluations?

Does it offer free support and training?

- What kinds of educational platforms and resources are available—during training and beyond?
- Are there any fees associated with access to customer service?

Does it have built-in compliance tools?

- Does it include functional limitation reporting, 8-minute rule monitoring, and therapy cap-tracking?
- Does it have an intuitive ICD-10 code picker?
  - Do you provide free ICD-10 training, support, and resources?
  - Do you maintain a complete library of ICD-9 and ICD-10 codes?
  - Do you base your ICD-10 code library on more than general equivalence mappings (GEMs)?
  - Will the software prompt therapists to document the specific details of every patient's injury or issue?
  - Will the software suggest a more specific code when one exists?
  - Will the software alert therapists when they select an invalid or unbillable code?
  - Does your software use an automatic crosswalking tool that one-to-one translates ICD-9 to ICD-10? Remember, one-to-one crosswalks are nearly impossible, so softwares that boast this capability likely aren't choosing the most specific or applicable codes.

Are integrated billing options available?

- Does the software integrate with my billing software of choice—or, does the company offer its own billing software or service that integrates with its documentation platform?
- Are any pieces of the software being offered at no cost? (Remember the old adage: "you get what you pay for.")

Does it offer business intelligence tools?

- Specifically, will my practice be able to:
  - Monitor staff productivity and audit activity?
  - Track and identify lost patients—including cancellations and no-shows—as well as clinic billing information such as claim status and units billed?
  - Assess clinic compliance by reviewing easy-to-understand reports, including a Medicare therapy cap report, which shows patients' progression toward the cap?
  - Manage patient notes to ensure patients' plans of care are always up to date?
  - Review the impact of my marketing efforts through referral tracking and reporting?

Will it support my front office?

- Does the software offer intuitive scheduling functionality?
- Will it allow us to use automated appointment reminders?
- Does it include embeddable, customizable patient intake forms?

Will the software be able to scale as my business does?

- What is the fee structure?
- Is there a contract? If so, what are the details of it?

Who owns the data we enter into the system?

- If we decide to leave, will we be able to take it with us?
- Are there any penalties or fees associated with leaving?

Does the software track patient outcomes data?

- Does it include integrated patient-reported outcome measures, such as the Quick DASH, Lower Extremity Functional Scale (LEFS), Oswestry, Neck Disability Index, and Dizziness Handicap Inventory?
- Does it generate easy-to-read reports about how my clinic is performing at the therapist, clinic, regional, and national levels?

Will it help my clinic save money on supplies?

- Does it offer a secure e-commerce platform—complete with a PCI/DSS compliant checkout interface—that provides one-page checkout, repeat shopping lists and reminders, and free shipping for qualifying orders?

Does the company's leadership team advocate for PTs?

- Is a PT in charge?
- Is he or she actively involved in the industry—speaking as a thought leader on the topics that matter to PTs and advocating for the future of your profession?
- Is he or she a member of the APTA—or involved with any industry boards or organizations?
- Is he or she respected as a leader within the community?
- Is the company only publishing promotional information about the software—or, is it also publishing free, helpful, and relevant articles, blogs, webinars, and guides about topics that matter to the PT profession?

The bottom line: The best practice management solutions have all the answers you're looking for. If the solution you're considering doesn't, then you—and your practice—can do better.
Go to get.webpt.com/emrguides to see WebPT in action.

Let's Talk

I'm a physical therapist with more than 15 years of experience practicing in sports medicine and orthopedic private practice. I'm also the co-founder and president of **WebPT**, which is a web-based electronic medical record solution for PTs, OTs, and SLPs. I started this company in 2008 with my husband, Brad—a seasoned technologist—because there wasn't a documentation software available that truly suited my needs as a physical therapist and clinic director. Since then, we've grown to more than 55,000 Members at over 8,500 clinics. My team and I created this billing guide because one of our goals as a company is to help rehab therapists achieve greatness in practice. And that starts with education.

I'd love to open up a discussion about billing and our profession in general. Join me on LinkedIn or Twitter, or shoot me an email. The only way we can propel the PT, OT, and SLP industries forward is through honest dialogue. Can't wait to hear from you.

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About WebPT

With more than 55,000 members and 8,500 clinics, WebPT is the leading electronic medical record (EMR) solution for physical, occupational, and speech therapists. Simple and affordable, WebPT makes it easy for therapy professionals to transition from paper and clunky server-based software to a user-friendly, web-based solution. With WebPT, clinic owners, therapists, directors, and front office staff have HIPAA-compliant access to patients' medical records anywhere, anytime, from any web-enabled device.

WebPT's therapy-centric design and scalable architecture make it a great fit for clinics of any size, and the web-based application alleviates any large, upfront investments; costly IT support; or bulky, in-office servers. It provides an integrated method to manage patient documents and progress as well as clinic schedules, analytical reports, and billing. WebPT has an intuitive workflow, allowing therapists to efficiently create compliant and consistent documentation.

In addition to documentation, WebPT offers a front office package that includes the tools necessary to run an organized clinic, including a multiuser scheduler with appointment reminders and the ability to upload external patient documents. Through WebPT's suite of reporting tools, therapists and staff can track productivity, cancellations, and no-shows as well as referrals. Therapists also can benchmark and track patient progress through WebPT's outcomes tracking product. Lastly, WebPT's billing options—including the WebPT Billing Service and integrations with several certified billing partners—ensure clinics receive reliable, accurate claims submission and processing as well as speedy, maximized reimbursements.

With WebPT, rehab therapists have a modern, intuitive EMR system that's well-suited to their needs, empowering them to be better in business—and more importantly, enabling them to spend less time on documentation and billing and more time with their patients.

Headquartered in the historic Warehouse District in downtown Phoenix, WebPT has a 99.9% uptime rate and a 99.5% customer retention rate. It was named to the Inc. 5000 list of the nation's fastest-growing companies four years in a row.

Learn more about WebPT.