

How to Select Software for Your Healthcare at Home Agency in 2017

Are you starting the new year with a software search for your home health or hospice agency? If you're like most agencies, you're using a software solution that was purchased many years ago that's been long-since outgrown. Your agency has diversified and evolved. Is your software keeping up? Let's explore how to make the right decision for your next technology partner.

Decide why it's time to make a change

Does your old software requires numerous updates that disrupt care or drain resources? Or is it a web-based solution that hasn't kept pace with changing technology...or the industry? Some agencies are working on "homegrown" software, while some use software just for billing and/or scheduling. There are also many reports of failure to launch point-of-care documentation while others have reported major work-arounds to successfully operate their agencies. These are all valid reasons to switch, and this article contains tips for any agency looking to upgrade their technology.

Your decision is important, as you'll likely be living with your software solution for a long time. Switching can be trepidatious, and some research and planning ahead of time will save you a lot of grief down the road, allowing you to reap the benefits of a modern software that will truly benefit your agency's mission.

Do some "Soul Searching"

What are the most important features needed in an EMR software to help your agency run more efficiently? Does billing drive your agency, as was the case for most agencies 10 years ago, or is the opportunity for efficiency on the clinical side where 3 out of 4 users operate? Look beyond the "nice to have" features and boil the selection process down to why you decided to move on to new software. In other words, decide what you're willing to give up and what you must have. If you have strong compliance processes in place,



perhaps more important or as equally important in your software is a user-friendly point of care solution. Maybe one software has a great feature that saves the biller several hours a month. How does that weigh against a solution that saves your 100 nurses 30 minutes each day? Deciding what's truly important to you will make these trade-off decisions easier to make.

Imagine your agency in a few years

If you're growing, you're likely diversifying your services by adding business lines. Many agencies that primarily provided Medicare Home Health five years ago are finding ways to add complimentary services such as private duty home care, hospice, pediatrics, or even unique programs such as transitional care or adult day care. Some are trying Medicaid or Community-Based programs as agencies dip their toes in the pre-acute pool of home care services. This leaves forward-thinking agencies in a difficult situation, as many software solutions can't handle the technology and diversity needs of the agency of the future. As agencies grow, it's becoming more and more common to see them operating on three or more software solutions, or documenting primarily on paper. Is this acceptable

to you? What would it mean to have visibility and reporting capability across all your locations and service lines on a single platform? Ask yourself: is there a solution that can truly operate all your lines of service now and in the foreseeable future?

Check out the software

Do your demos, and ask questions. Don't take features for granted. For example, does the vendor say they can add custom forms that look like your paper forms? Ask to see an example. Confirm your unique payors can be billed before you make your final decision.

It's difficult to fight the tendency to get hung up on a favorite feature in your old software that isn't offered in the new software. Keep in mind that you can always request development or customization as part of the contract. Conversely, the purpose of your favorite feature might be achieved through other functionality in the new software. Remember that change often requires a new way of doing things.

In an era of cloud-based solutions, be aware of the "roots" of your solution. Who created it and why? Was it a client-server solution that was "fork-lifted" to the cloud or truly cloud-based and optimized for the web?

If cloud-based, find out where the data is housed and how secure it is. As a compliant agency, you know well the HIPAA requirements of holding a Business Associate Agreement (BAA) with all vendors. You're likely to insist your cloud-based software provider signs one as part of your agreement. Does your software vendor have one in place with their hosting entity? Large cloud hosts like Microsoft Cloud and Amazon Web Services will not sign a BAA with any software provider that doesn't live up to stringent security standards. Make sure your provider has passed this scrutiny and has a BAA in place with their web host.

How much customization?

Do you have processes in place to accommodate regulatory requirements for specific programs? Do you require electronic forms that emulate paper forms you're trying to eliminate? This is an easy way to eliminate vendors from the selection process, as most can't deliver on this. One caveat- if you have special forms and a vendor tells you that they can recreate

LARGE CLOUD HOSTS LIKE AMAZON WILL NOT SIGN A BAA WITH ANY SOFTWARE VENDOR THAT DOESN'T LIVE UP TO STRINGENT SECURITY STANDARDS

them electronically, ask for an example. This is especially important for Medicaid services, where the forms must be exact recreations of the paper forms that are required by state agencies that operate the programs.

Involve your staff

Invite a few key employees to the demos and take their input seriously. They will be the ones who use the software in their day-to-day work. Having their buy-in will help ensure success during the implementation.

Talk to other providers, or their staff who now work with you

References are important, but don't settle for one and move on- if a reference was provided by the software vendor, you should make your own list of the important issues to your business and dive in. For example, if ease-of-use is important, create some specific questions centered around this. If support is important to you, get details: How is their response time? If support is provided overseas, does this impact turnaround?

About Online Reviews

We're in an age where we trust the opinion of a complete stranger before making a buying decision, and there are plenty of online viewpoints in the home health care software industry. Everyone has a voice today, so if a customer or anyone in an organization is dissatisfied, they can post their opinion online. If you see bad reviews or comments on Facebook or Twitter, don't read too much into it. It could be the knee-jerk reaction of an end user who doesn't see the whole picture. That said, it's important to see how the company responds. If negative feedback is ignored, this may be a bad sign.

The best reviews are honest, with real pluses and minuses of the software solution. I'd discount a vendor has an unusually large number of reviews that are 100% positive or were all posted on the same month. Vendors

should encourage honest reviews that reflect not only the product, but the relationship with their customers.

Who is the behind the software?

Look for opportunities to get to know your vendors and get a better “feel” for their strengths, weaknesses, and culture. Take a look at LinkedIn- Do they have a small number of employees? Are support staff overseas? Is the company owned by a private equity firm that hired managers and key people from outside of the industry? These are all important considerations when evaluating vendors for a long-term partnership.

Check out state and industry trade shows. If the vendor participates, it's often a sign that they have other customers in the region and are able to address the local challenges that come with providing home health care.

Bonus Tips:

These tips aren't for the process of choosing the software, but are more about SUCCESS with your chosen software. You might argue they are more important than the selection process itself!

Get top management buy-in. This seems obvious, but many software projects have been derailed by end-users who didn't like the initial changes and weren't patient enough to give it a try. If disgruntled end users sense weak management support, this can be a disaster. Make sure top management is on board, and that they will do whatever it takes to support the successful implementation of your new software.

Get a strong project manager on YOUR side. Your vendor will have a project manager, but you need one too. If you think you can sign a contract and the vendor will take care of everything, you are mistaken. There will be bumps in the road. This project manager will be the voice of your agency, and all vendor requests and communication should flow through them. Good communication and follow-up is key for any project.

Get staff buy-in. Change is hard, especially when you've done something a certain way for a long period of time. Buy-in is essential, so including staff in the process is key. Identify key influencers that others in your organization look to as leaders. Getting their participation and buy-in will pay dividends during implementation.

Some agencies go so far as to have a kick-off party to rally the staff and get them prepared not only for change, but for the challenges that will be encountered.

Be honest with your staff. You're investing for the long-term benefits of your agency, and they need to know this. There will be some changes in their processes, but they will adapt. I remember an implementation over 10 years ago when an intake nurse told me “After our first training, I didn't sleep that night. I asked myself how I would possibly learn this software. Now, after a few months, I can't imagine doing my job without this software”

Be patient and open-minded with the software solution you choose. Often after choosing and implementing, you'll learn the new software doesn't operate the same way as the old. Is this because the agency is hanging onto old processes that are often inefficient and cumbersome? When you're implementing software, just remember there is a reason you decided to leave your old software behind. Just because your old software was the right choice at one point in time doesn't mean it's the right choice to get you through the future!

Selecting the right software will feel more like a partnership, where there is a vested interest in mutual success. Take your time, do your research, and do your best to enjoy the process as a learning experience. There are many, many options out there.

Good luck in your search!

About DeVero

DeVero provides a multi-service line healthcare platform that provides an easy-to-use, adaptable, and highly scalable solution that meets the emerging needs driven by the transformation of healthcare. Providers, payers and government organizations leverage DeVero to efficiently collect, share and integrate patient and population data from any location, using any device. Based in Silicon Valley and founded by tech and healthcare experts, DeVero was born to create innovative solutions to common business challenges. Visit <http://www.devero.com> or call (800) 219-0664 to learn more.