

# Make Your **EHR SYSTEM** Work for You



One practice finds that customization holds the key to true gains in efficiency and patient care

**O**ur comprehensive ophthalmic group practice moved to electronic health records (EHR) almost 5 years ago. As many other practices contemplate a similar transition, I can say that it's hard



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to imagine providing our patients with the level of care and service we want to provide without EHR.

Our motivation in converting to electronic records was to move away from the inherent inefficiencies of paper charts, which were becoming increasingly troublesome in a multi-doctor practice. We knew that to be successful, we needed an EHR system that would support us, rather than slow us down. And we wanted to be able to mold the system to do what *we* wanted, rather than the other way around.

Our experience has shown that to truly reap the benefits of EHR, the system must be customizable to meet the changing demands of practice.

After researching several EHR systems, the one that best met our requirements at a reasonable cost was Compulink's Ophthalmology Advantage. The implementation went very smoothly, and we haven't created a single new paper chart since.

An added bonus of EHR for us is that patients love it. Each of our 11 exam lanes is equipped with a 17-inch monitor on a swing arm where patients can watch educational videos and where we can display their test results, diagnostic images and other details from their records. It conveys exactly the impression we want—that of a technologically advanced office providing patients with premium care.

## Customization: Have it your way

A lot of doctors interpret “customization” to mean that the EHR system is too basic or general and they have to do the work to “fix” it. That may be true of some systems, but Ophthalmology Advantage is already tailored to an ophthalmic practice. You could certainly use it successfully without customizing anything.

But if you want to maximize the benefits of an EHR system and use it to help you actually practice better medicine, the software should support your clinical decision making. It should be able to encompass all the information you need to make a diagnosis, show you data in a format that is useful to you, and allow you to enter information efficiently in a way that is comfortable for you. Ophthalmologists are “Type A” people: We like to do things our way. And that means that an EHR system really needs to be tailored to each individual doctor.

That’s exactly why we customized our software. For example, I tend to note a normal anterior chamber as “deep and quiet.” One of my partners prefers “clear and deep” while the other simply writes “deep.” Thanks to some simple customization, we can each keep using the terminology we like. When I am logged in, the default option in the A/C drop-down box is “deep and quiet;” the others see a slightly different default. This was a minor change, but one that made using the EHR system more familiar and comfortable for each of us.

Advantage is very easy to customize. We are constantly tweaking the software to reflect a change in our patient flow or a new technology we’ve added in the office. Minor changes are made by the chief technician; I make more important ones myself. Here are some examples of how customization makes EHR work better for us, and for our patients:

## Make efficient use of chair time

Customizable “smart functions” tell the software to perform calculations, auto-fill sections, or copy data from one place to another when certain criteria are met. We’ve added a custom feature to the keratometry section to facilitate decisions and discussions about toric IOLs. As soon as the technician enters the second keratometry (K) reading, the software automatically calculates the difference between the horizontal and vertical Ks. This

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eliminates human error and ensures that we are ready to address our astigmatic patients’ needs with just a glance at the screen.

## Use data to improve outcomes

We added a searchable field on the surgical report screen where we can enter the type of IOL implanted. If I have selected “ReSTOR Multifocal” in that box, for example, the system automatically prompts technicians to check both near and distance vision during follow-up exams. This saves time in sending patients back for missed near vision testing. And because the field is searchable, we can easily pull up all results for the ReSTOR (or any other IOL) to analyze our multifocal outcomes or to optimize IOLMaster A-constants.

## Track glaucoma better


Like every other ophthalmologist, I used to keep a glaucoma flow sheet in the front of my charts. After each visit, either my technician or I would have to copy over the IOP, medications, and other relevant information so that everything was summarized on a single sheet of paper. With EHR, the flow sheet is automatic and much more robust. The main flow sheet screen plots IOP at every

visit. I can click any field, including visual acuity or medications, to see a complete history for that field. I can click on the OCT tab to see all the OCT images we’ve obtained over the years for that patient. There is no more flipping through reams of paper to get a sense of how the pressure has changed with various interventions or what has happened to the optic nerve over time. Moreover, I can easily show patients the comparison to explain why I’m recommending a particular course of action.

Much of this tracking functionality was already built in, but we have customized the software to make sure that we can view data and images in exactly the way we want to make the best clinical decisions. For example, I changed the glaucoma flow sheet to show only ophthalmic medications. While I want the systemic medications elsewhere in the record, they aren’t a priority for me in tracking progression. Tracking progression of a chronic disease is one of the great advantages of EHR.

## Customization: A must-have for EHR

Customization will ensure that EHR doesn’t slow you down or force you to conform to someone else’s idea of how an exam ought to go — even if that “someone” is your partner! Done right, it can even help you practice better medicine.

All EHR systems allow customization to some degree. But anyone considering EHR for a busy, premium practice should really delve into how easy the system is to customize, exactly what elements can be customized, and whether you can do it yourself or have to rely on the vendor to do it for you. The reality is that clinical practice changes. When you come to depend on electronic records you want to make sure they can evolve with your practice to best serve your patients. 

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