Making Your EHR System Work for You

Ellsworth Medical Clinic, a family practice in rural Wisconsin, won national recognition last year in the Million Hearts® Hypertension Control Challenge. "We increased the number of patients in control of their blood pressure from 75% to more than 90%," said Dr. Tashjian, a family physician at Ellsworth. The clinic's success can be attributed in part to how the care team creatively uses its electronic health record (EHR) system to proactively manage chronic disease. Below, the care team at Ellsworth Medical Clinic outlines steps and offers advice for making your EHR system work for you.

> *"We increased the number of patients in control of their blood pressure from 75% to more than 90%"*
>
> **Dr. Christopher Tashjian**

1 Know What You Want

- Outline desired EHR capabilities (e.g., export data, run reports)
- Request staff input on desired EHR capabilities
- Work with your Regional Extension Center (REC) to select the right vendor

2 Learn Your EHR System

- Take the time to learn the functions of the system
- Create shortcuts to make the system easier to use
- Work with your REC to redesign work flows

3 Be Creative

- Use the system to deliver health care proactively (e.g., tracking patients and sending reminders)
- Delegate responsibility to your care team (e.g., assigning someone to order labs before appointments)
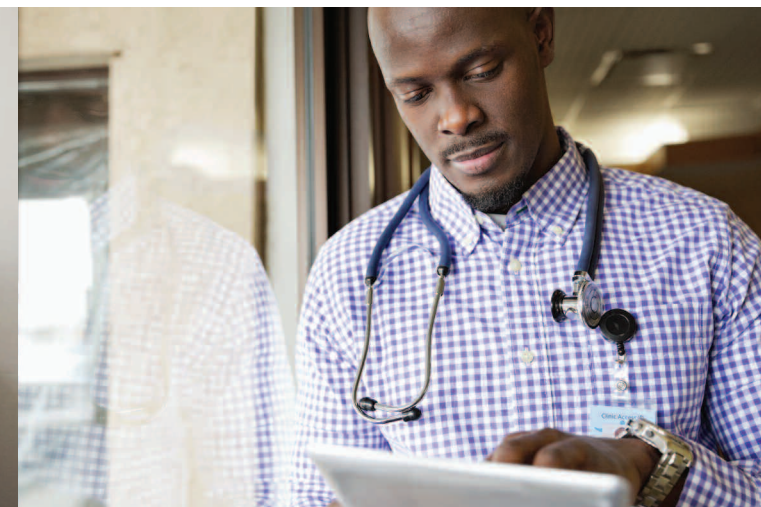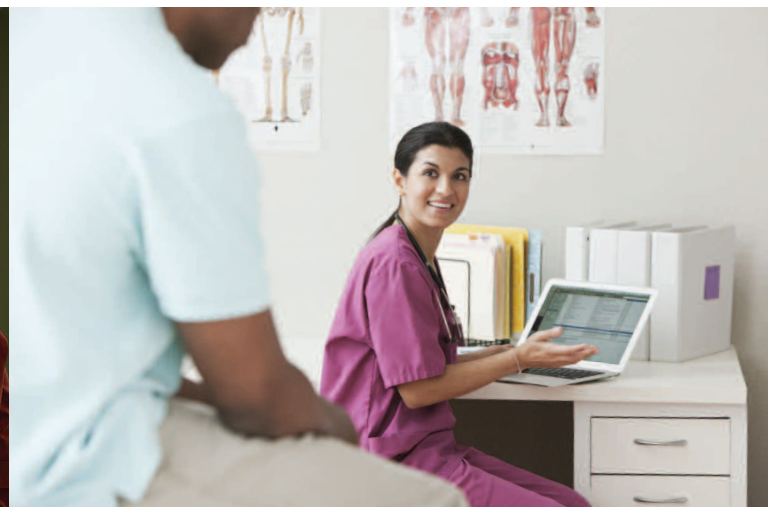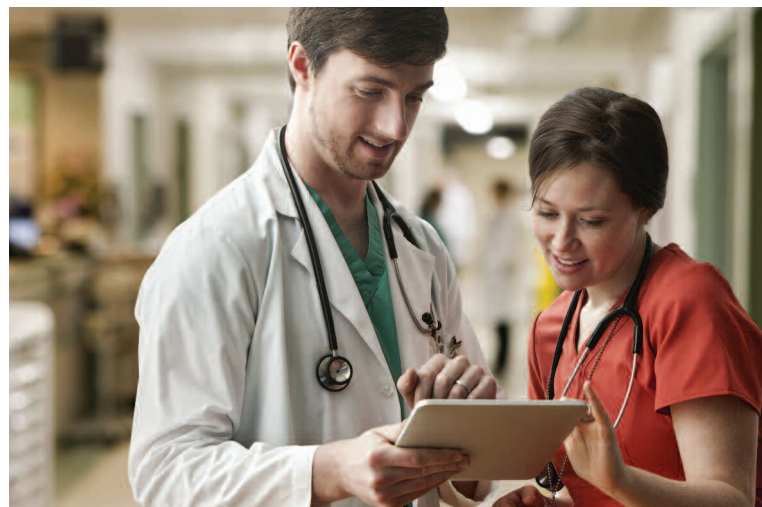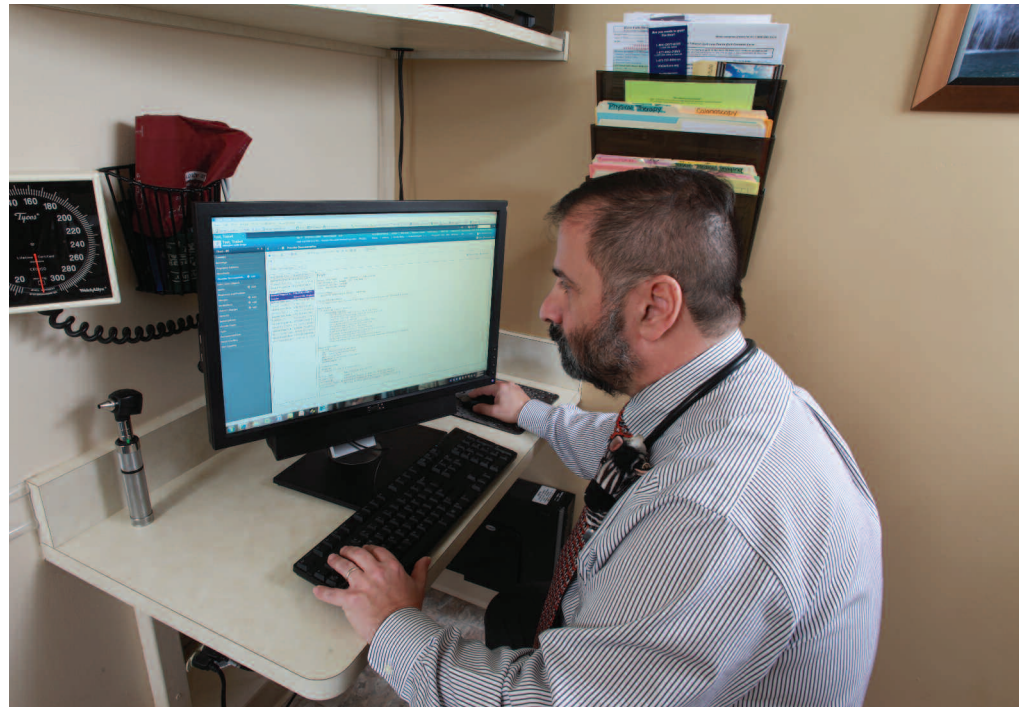
1 Know What You Want

The care team at Ellsworth Medical Clinic knew it wanted to export EHR data into an external spreadsheet. This would allow the team to determine which patients met the criteria for five important diabetes measures: Blood pressure, A1c level, LDL cholesterol, tobacco use, and aspirin use. Using this information, the care team could rank its patients, target immediate opportunities for improvement (e.g., those who met four of the five measures), and take the necessary additional steps to make these patients fully controlled.

2 Learn Your EHR System

The care team took the time it needed to fully learn the functionalities of the EHR system. During this time, they created macros, favorite buttons, and pre-completed note templates to make the system easier to use. For example, when filling out the return-to-clinic order, the care team created a macro that allowed the physician to choose the follow up duration (e.g. six months) until the next visit. The macro would then automatically convert the duration into an actual date that the patient needed to be seen or contacted.

3 Be Creative

Once the system established a follow up date in the return-to-clinic order, the care team could actively track the patients on a day-by-day basis. One week before a patient was due for a visit, the care team could proactively reach out and schedule a time for the patient to get any tests completed, such as A1c levels. With the tests completed ahead of time, the physician and patient could have a more meaningful conversation about the individual's health status and next steps.