

Exploring the prospects of cloud computing in EHR/EMR systems



In the evolving Healthcare landscape, the expectations for Healthcare delivery systems are rapidly changing. Beyond providing high-quality treatment, Healthcare Providers now face the demand for a comprehensive patient experience, with a focus on value-based care. Traditional models of care are being replaced by telemedicine and virtual delivery models. Central to these transformations is the access to Healthcare data.

Origins of EMR/EHR systems

The implementation of EMR/EHR systems in the Healthcare industry can be traced back to the 1960s. Initially considered a luxury due to their high cost, these systems were primarily used by the government in collaboration with health organizations. Over time, as care delivery systems evolved and health plans became more involved, there was a significant increase in the demand for access and sharing of medical data. This, coupled with the growing importance of medical data privacy and security compliance, led to a widespread adoption of EMR/EHRs in Healthcare. EMRs, or Electronic Medical Records, are digital versions of patient records used within a single Healthcare organization. They typically contain information such as medical history, allergies, diagnosis, treatment plan, medications, and test results. On the other hand, EHRs, or Electronic Health Records, are designed to be shared across multiple Healthcare organizations and include a patient's medical history from various Healthcare facilities they have visited. Both EMRs and EHRs have the common goal of enhancing the quality of Healthcare by providing comprehensive and accessible patient data. With digital records, sharing data, ensuring patient safety, and coordinating care becomes more efficient. The advanced features of EMR/EHR systems, including data analytics, provide caregivers with advisories and best practices for specific conditions, while also helping Healthcare organizations meet compliance requirements.

Need for a new approach within EMR/EHR systems

The complexity of managing Healthcare data, with the need for data access across different locations, increased security and compliance requirements, and various data collection methods, necessitates a new approach to EMR/EHR systems. Traditional storage practices are costly and not efficient for the ever-expanding nature of Healthcare data. The increasing volume of data presents challenges in securing, moving, accessing, and managing critical Healthcare information. A new data storage and maintenance technology is required to optimize data management and access practices.

Additionally, changes in consumer behavior, accessibility to information, technological advancements, and Healthcare policies have driven the demand for personalized Healthcare and telemedicine services. The emphasis on preventive care and compliance with data confidentiality and privacy laws further complicate the operational approach of EMR/EHR systems. Therefore, a shift in approach is essential to address these evolving requirements.

Cloud-based EHRs serve as a comprehensive solution, encompassing data storage and providing users with improved data accessibility, efficient security systems, and advanced analytical insights. Cloud storage offers scalability and cost-effectiveness in terms of both capital and operational expenditures. The cloud's security features guarantee that stored data remains secure and compliant with all guidelines.

Cloud-based EHRs leverage cloud technology to securely store and exchange medical information for patients. This solution empowers Healthcare professionals to access and manage patient data, including medical history, test results, and medications, from any location and at any time. Additionally, cloud-based EHRs facilitate seamless communication among care teams, appointment scheduling, and prescription ordering across various devices. Ultimately, this comprehensive solution enables Healthcare Providers to enhance the delivery of care.



Advantages of cloud-based EHRs

Enhanced cybersecurity features

Cloud service providers differentiate themselves by prioritizing security. They employ specialized security teams who invest significantly in safeguarding the cloud infrastructure through advanced security measures. These providers offer a range of security features to enhance the protection of cloud-hosted EHR systems and Healthcare data. Real-time monitoring of the environment, applications, and data is a hallmark of cloud-based EMRs, enabling the prompt identification of suspicious activity, potential threats, and vulnerabilities. For instance, Amazon Macie, an AWS service, utilizes machine learning and pattern matching to safeguard sensitive data.

Compliance with industry standards and certifications is a crucial aspect of cloud services. Many cloud providers adhere to specific certifications, providing customers with the assurance that their cloud hosted EHR systems and data meet HIPAA standards and regulations. Additionally, cloud providers employ robust encryption mechanisms for data both in transit and at rest, preventing unauthorized access to sensitive information if a breach or data interception occurs. The Identity and Access Management (IAM) feature, available through AWS, further ensures that data access is restricted to authorized stakeholders. AWS IAM allows users to create and manage user groups and employ secure permission mechanisms for resource access.

Cloud providers also possess global threat intelligence, enabling them to proactively address emerging cybersecurity threats and update their security measures accordingly. Amazon Inspector, for instance, automates security assessments to enhance application security and compliance.

Integrated care delivery experience:

In today's Healthcare landscape, data integration and interoperability have become essential for successful electronic health record (EHR) systems. Cloud-based medical records are crucial for achieving this integration and facilitating the transition to value-based Healthcare. By storing patient data in centralized repositories, these cloud-based electronic medical records (EMRs) make it easy to access information from various Healthcare settings and locations. This seamless integration allows health data to be collected from multiple sources including hospitals, clinics, laboratories, and other providers. Moreover, cloud-based systems often support interoperability standards, enabling the exchange of health information across different Healthcare systems.

Real-time access to patient information is greatly enhanced by cloud-based EMRs. Healthcare Providers can quickly access patient data, empowering them to make informed decisions promptly. Additionally, these cloud-based EMRs enable Healthcare professionals to collaborate and coordinate care by accessing and contributing to a patient's record. This ensures that all members of a Healthcare team have up-to-date information about a patient's medical history, treatments, and ongoing care plans. In the future, the integration of cloud-based records with telemedicine platforms will enable virtual consultations and remote monitoring, further improving access to care.

This integration is particularly important for providing continuous and proactive care, especially for patients with chronic conditions or those in remote locations. Cloud-based EMRs also offer patient portals and engagement tools, empowering individuals to actively participate in their Healthcare. This, in turn, can lead to better preventive care and reduced administrative burden.

Use of Analytics and AI in care delivery

The Healthcare industry can leverage the vast dataset of EMR/EHR data to implement analytics and AI solutions in care delivery. Cloud computing services make it easy to adopt these solutions in Healthcare practices. AI algorithms can analyze large amounts of Healthcare data stored in cloud databases to generate personalized treatment plans that address individual patient needs. AWS offers Amazon Comprehend Medical, an ML-powered natural language processing tool that extracts relevant medical information from unstructured text. Cloud-based AI chatbots and virtual assistants can streamline Healthcare communication and reduce administrative tasks. Furthermore, integrated cloud-based AI algorithms can analyze patient data from electronic health records to identify risk factors and enable early disease detection, diagnosis, and treatment.



Challenges of moving to cloud-based EHRs

Cloud-based electronic health records (EHRs) are seen as the future of Healthcare due to their advanced features and industry adaptability. A recent study reveals that around 70% of Healthcare organizations are preparing to migrate their data to the cloud, aiming to leverage the benefits of cloud services for improved Healthcare delivery. However, despite the attractiveness of cloud-based EHRs, there are challenges and reservations associated with a complete transition to the cloud.

Migration effects and integration complexity:

The Healthcare industry demands uninterrupted system operations, as even brief downtimes can have disastrous consequences. Ensuring business continuity during the migration process presents a challenge. Moving from on-premises data servers to cloud computing carries the risk of data discrepancies and system downtime. Additionally, achieving seamless data integration across organizations, geographical locations, and providers is an extremely complex task. Successful migration to the cloud demands meticulous planning and a robust data retrieval setup to prevent any surprises or disruptions. Integrating legacy systems with modern cloud platforms is also challenging due to differences in architecture, data formats, and technology stacks, requiring careful planning and safety measures.

Customization challenge:

Cloud-based EHRs, as software-as-a-service (SaaS) solutions, pose complexities when it comes to customizations tailored to the unique needs of Healthcare organizations. Meeting the requirements of different Healthcare Providers through customizations can be challenging with cloud-based EHRs. Organizations may need to rely on specific workflows provided by SaaS enhancements or switch to more advanced services offered by the cloud platform to meet their needs.

Connectivity dependency:

Efficient functioning of cloud-based EHR systems heavily relies on a strong and reliable internet connection. Lag time or latency can severely impact the system's ability to access information online. Medical practices operating online cannot reach their full potential without a robust internet connection. Moreover, poor connectivity can lead to decreased bandwidth, negatively affecting overall performance.

Backlash from patients:

Cloud technology is still evolving, and some patients have concerns about their sensitive medical information being stored on the web. The fear of potential data exposure and vulnerability has led some patients to prefer keeping their data on-premises. Shifting the mindset of Healthcare consumers regarding cloud-based EHR platforms will require extensive awareness campaigns and education from cloud providers to assure patients and Healthcare organizations of the enhanced security features available.

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Summary

Cloud-based EHRs have become extremely popular due to their many advantages, including leveraging AI and analytics-based services, enhanced cybersecurity, improved agility and scalability of data management, and enhanced patient experience. As a result, a large number of EHR systems are now migrating or planning to migrate to the cloud. However, there are certain issues and concerns that need to be addressed beforehand. Data migration and integration are complex and challenging tasks when switching from on-prem systems to cloud computing. Additionally, ease of customization and maintaining security standards and compliance with regulations across different locations are areas of concern for cloud-based EHR users. Lastly, cloud service providers must work to gain acceptance from their users.