RubiconMD

Best Practices for Choosing the Right eConsult Platform

A comprehensive checklist for primary care organizations

Integrating eConsult technology into primary care enables more accessible, comprehensive, and high-quality care. Specialist-informed care plans are proven to reduce costs and enhance the patient experience. It's now widely known that eConsult platforms improve care and streamline communication between primary care providers and specialists. However, selecting the right eConsult platform and effectively implementing this technology can be daunting, so we've pulled together a handy checklist to bring more ease to this process.

Below is a best practice guide for healthcare providers when choosing an eConsult platform. This checklist will help you select a vendor that best aligns with your needs.

A Comprehensive Checklist for Selecting an eConsult Platform:

1. **Define Your Goals.**

   Begin by identifying the primary needs that you hope eConsults can support. For example, are you looking to:

   ○ Reduce wait times for specialist advice
   ○ Reduce referrals per visit and treat more patients within primary care
   ○ Enhance care coordination between primary and specialty care
   ○ Bolster existing disease management, population health, or quality improvement programs
   ○ Improve patient outcomes specific to a condition or within a specific patient cohort

   Clear goals will guide your decision-making process. Work with your clinic managers and program directors to develop your needs list and goals that align with these needs.

2. Assess Your Workflows.

Before diving into the eConsult selection process, do a deep dive into your existing workflows and review where specialty care (via eConsults) would fit in.

- What are your current specialty care workflows today?
- Do your specialty workflows vary based on specialty?
- What would be your ideal workflow with eConsults?
- Are there specific workflows you have in mind, in general, or per condition or specialty?
- What specialty care workflow or program would impact patient outcomes?

If you have a multi-site operation, be sure that you gather information from each site to ensure you account for variations by site. This will help to fully scope your needs and can support standardization efforts through the eConsult selection process.

3. Identity Anticipated Challenges.

Identifying and addressing challenges early in the implementation and adoption process is crucial for ensuring the smooth and successful integration of any new technology or workflow.

- Develop a list of potential challenges and perceived friction points as it relates to adopting new technology and using eConsults.
- Be sure to consult with care team representatives who will be utilizing the platform.
- Identify challenges related to technology, process, staff, and behavior change.

4. Assess the Scope of Specialties Covered

Ensure that the platform provides access to the specific specialties that meet your needs. Consider these questions to build out your list:

- What are the top specialties that you most often refer to?
- Are there any specialties that present exceptionally long wait times in your geographic region?
- Are there specific sub-specialties that you'd like to improve access to?

Once you've built out your list of most needed specialties, review the service level availability per vendor for these desired specialties.

5. Get a Demo & Evaluate User-friendliness

Seeing an eConsult platform in action is the best way to ensure it's intuitive and easy to use. A few tips:

- Be sure to invite clinicians to the demo session to ask questions.
- Explore product features like account credentialing, team collaboration, attachments, follow-up questions, and routing for a second opinion.

A user-friendly interface is highly correlated with a positive user experience with new technology. This can increase adoption rates and reduce the learning curve for your staff.

6. Review the Quality Assurance Process

The value of an eConsult service is only as good as the quality of the Specialist Network and the eConsult responses it delivers. Be sure to ask your vendor questions to understand the following:

- How does the vendor select their specialists?
- What type of credentialing is required?
- What are the training protocols?
- How does the vendor ensure high-quality specialist responses?
- Are there any other quality assurance measures in place?

7. Consider Integration Capabilities

If you are interested in integrating your eConsult platform with your existing electronic health record (EHR), then you should review the integration options available with each vendor.

- Does the vendor integrate with your current EHR?
- What steps are required and what is a typical timeline to set up the integration?
- Are there fees associated with integration?
- What does the integrated workflow look like?
- Are there any other options to support a seamless workflow, like SSO?
- Does the vendor have an in-house integration team to support you or do they outsource this?

Investing in integration is an investment in the success of eConsult adoption. When eConsults are easily accessible right from the EHR, it delivers a more seamless experience for your clinical teams and drives up utilization of eConsults.

8. Check Compliance and Security

Before exploring what a vendor offers in terms of security– check with your compliance and security teams to get a list of your requirements ready to share with potential vendors. Some tips when reviewing compliance and security:

- Ensure the platform complies with HIPAA regulations and other relevant regulations to protect patient data.
- Consider seeking a vendor with a HITRUST certification; as this includes HIPAA compliance but goes beyond the basic requirements to ensure the security of your patient and provider data.
- Ask for documentation on encryption protocols, data storage practices, and compliance certifications.

9. Look for Customization and Scalability

The platform should be adaptable to your institution's changing requirements as your practice or eConsult utilization grows.

- Consider the scalability of the eConsult service.
- Ensure that the platform can grow with your business and accommodate an increasing number of users and interactions.
- Ask what services the vendor offers to support your scale goals?
- Determine how easy is it to add additional specialties, users, or administrators onto the platform.

10. Evaluate Support and Training Services

A reliable vendor should offer comprehensive support and training to facilitate a smooth transition on ongoing satisfaction with your new platform.

- Do you have managers or team members in place who are experienced in workflow change management?
- What type of support team will your eConsult vendor provide?
- What implementation and training services are offered to support your clinical teams?
- Do they support Champion or Ambassador programs?
- Is there a centralized resource center available for training & support?
- What type of ongoing customer support is available? Is there a support center, how do you access it, and what is the turnaround time on inquiries?

Working with an organization that has a robust Customer Success and Support Team will enable the effective adoption of eConsults and ensure you get prompt and reliable support when resolving issues.

8.   Review Cost & Potential ROI

Understand the pricing model of the eConsult service provider and what is included in their pricing. Often the lowest cost option comes with less value and a lower service level.

- ○   Evaluate whether the eConsult platform aligns with your budget and request a breakdown of the costs.
- ○   Some providers may offer subscription-based models, pay-per-use plans, or other pricing structures. Explore the options.
- ○   Ask the vendor to run a preliminary ROI analysis for you?

An eConsult platform will require an initial investment but the cost savings through improved care quality, avoided referrals and services, referral optimization, and avoided ED visits make it well worth the investment. In addition to this, eConsults promote provider education, patient satisfaction, improved continuity of care and help reduce health disparities.

9.   Determine the Process for Measuring Success

Explore the tools available to measure qualitative and quantitative success with your eConsult provider.

- ○   What reporting capabilities are available to review utilization of the tool and impact that it's having on patient care.
- ○   What resources are available to gather qualitative feedback?
- ○   Are there any reviews and testimonials that the eConsult service provider can share?

Choosing the right eConsult platform requires careful consideration of your organization's needs, a thorough evaluation of the options available, and a readiness to address the challenges that come with implementing a new solution. While the transition may not be without its hurdles, the long-term benefits of enhanced patient care, improved efficiency, and cost savings make eConsult platforms a valuable addition to the modern primary care landscape. By embracing these innovative tools, healthcare providers can ensure they are well-equipped to meet the evolving demands of patient care in the digital age.

To explore RubiconMD eConsult solutions
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