Evidence tells us that clients and health care providers alike value the efficiency of electronic medical records (EMR). However, the introduction of a computer screen into the health care provider/client relationship needs to be done conscientiously to ensure that the focus of the interaction is the client, not the computer screen. Use of these EMR best practice tips can allow the best of both worlds – the efficiency of the EMR with the healing power of human relationships.

Room Design

- Set up the room so that the client is seated to the side of the health provider’s desk as shown below. This set-up ensures that the computer screen does not block the line of vision between the client and the health care provider. In addition, the health care provider requires only slight postural adjustments when turning their attention to the EMR and then back to the client.
• Flat-screen monitors with mobile arms should be used to periodically turn the screen towards the client. This gives health care practitioners the opportunity to engage clients with the EMR, which increases client satisfaction with their encounter with their health care practitioner.

Verbal and Non-verbal Communication:

Lack of attending behaviors has a negative impact on health practitioner-client communication. Therefore:

• Turn and face the client each time you speak rather than looking at the computer screen.
• Do not communicate with the client during EMR use. If EMR use is necessary, pause the conversation then resume after EMR use.
• Be conscious of screen gazing - attend to the client after each time you use the EMR.
• Overall, health care providers can maintain connection with their clients when using the EMR by making an effort to make eye contact throughout the interview/assessment and by turning their body to face the client when not using the EMR.

Health Care Provider Skills

• Health care providers with excellent computer skills are better able to simultaneously use the EMR and talk with their clients.
• It may take six months to one year for a health care provider to become confident and competent using the EMR.
• Skilled communication in a health care provider prior to EMR implementation predicts skilled communication skills once the EMR is in place.

This tips sheet was developed as a result of a literature review completed by Ashley Orr and Allison Norrie for their Independent Study Project entitled “The Effect of Electronic Medical Record use on the Therapeutic Relationship” which they conducted for completion of their Masters of Occupational Therapy degree. For more information contact cara.brown@med.umanitoba.ca.
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