

# Why Templates Don't Work

by Dr. Richard Low, CEO of Infor-Med Corporation

Template Electronic Medical Records have been touted by the software industry as an acceptable way to document medicine and render uniform care to patients. Industry "experts" claim that templates and their underlying structured language will pave the way towards standardized medical documentation, promote interoperability of systems, and allow third parties the ability to utilize your results for the good of medicine as a whole. They claim that by using a template EMR, embedded with structured language, medical costs will be lowered, and the practice of medicine improved.

As we outline below, nothing could be farther from the truth. The reality is that instead of enhancing your ability to give quality care to your patients, **templates limit your ability to practice medicine well, curtail your revenues, and reduce your freedom of expression.** With the use of templates your personal style of practicing medicine and the ease and effectiveness of your approach are fundamentally lost. Templates, in short, are not beneficial for you, and are bad medicine for your patients.

An EMR template is nothing more than a boilerplate used as a text written by a third party or "expert" to input clinical data. The inflexibility of templates causes a series of fundamental problems during everyday use...

**Problem 1:** EMR templates are generated by someone else, using **their** words, **their** methodology, and, most importantly, **their** judgment. The template approach assumes that the maker of the system knows more about medicine than you, the actual physician user. Of even greater concern, this approach assumes that the template manufacturer knows what you are thinking and what you will be required to do at the point of care. The notion that a template manufacturer knows more about a physician's practice than the actual physician should be absurd to any experienced clinician.

**Problem 2:** It is impossible for someone else to create a template that thinks like its user. Therefore, a template designer must devise a structured format applicable to the majority of encounters you are likely to see. The result is a progression of cumbersome pick-lists that you must sort through in order to make the template fit each particular encounter. Even if the pick-lists were appropriate to the case at hand, finding text that someone else devised in endless pick-lists couldn't be more time-consuming or frustrating. Obviously, template text created by **someone else** is far more difficult to read than **self-written** text. From the order of symptoms and physical findings to the approach you use to treat each patient; everything is more natural when utilizing your own methodology, thinking process, and experience - rather than when working with someone else's.

**Problem 3:** The best medicine cannot always be found in a book. Often, it is based on your personal experience, your individual style, and your own thinking process. As you know, medicine is not only a science but also very much an art form. Therefore, a template cannot possibly take into account your individual uniqueness, not to mention the uniqueness of your patients. In fact, templates force you to constantly regulate and change your style of practice to that of a cookie cutter "one-size-fits-all" approach.

**Problem 4:** Despite today's claims of "smart templates" and the like, templates are not intelligent and cannot be easily modified for future use. Although template EMRs claim to allow for changes in text, the reality is that the constant editing of the template requires a cumbersome approach that does not lend itself well to your patient encounter, especially under the stress of your daily practice. What's worse, template-based systems allow for only one way of treating any given condition, and the choice rarely fits the many complexities and variations of each encounter. As a result, the effort required to change templates "on the fly" makes them clumsy, time consuming, and complicated - even more so than simply writing longhand.

**Problem 5: Templates are legally dangerous.** Your templates can actually be subpoenaed during the discovery phase of a malpractice suit. Imagine how pleased a plaintiff's attorney would be to find that your entire practice could be reduced to a series of structured statements and factoids. Suddenly, the art of medicine is diminished, and you appear as a mere technician forcing your patients into a single mold. For this reason alone, templates are an extremely bad idea.

## Insurance Companies Want Your EMR

Templates allow third party payers an exclusive opportunity to further "manage" you and your practice, a trend that has been growing over the last twenty years. Most third party payers are attempting to cut costs and increase revenues at your expense and at the expense of your patients. Indeed, the manipulative characteristics of templates with embedded structured language allow potential control by third parties.

## Templates Are Not The Answer

Despite industry claims to the contrary, templates have not answered the medical documentation dilemma.

This explains the general resistance to their adoption by medical practitioners.

Template manufacturers argue that templates will help

you practice better medicine. They say this only because they could not develop a better solution. Please don't be fooled. Struggling to fit your patient into a template mold is not what medicine should be about, and it's no way to practice your art.

The truth is that templates severely limit you.

**There is a far better answer to Electronic Medical Records: Praxis EMR.**

Praxis EMR was named the top EMR in the 2008 User Satisfaction Survey, held by the American Academy of Family Physicians, (AAFP) with 93,000 members nationwide.

Receiving the news of the AAFP results Doctor Richard Low was quoted as saying:

*"Praxis is the only EMR not based on templates, and this is why physicians prefer it to other EMRs. Templates turn doctors into technicians, forcing them to use rigid pick-lists in order to describe complex situations. Medicine is an art and no two doctors practice the same way. By learning each physician's individual approach, Praxis EMR documents patient encounters in the physician's own words. Using this software helps doctors save time and practice better medicine."*

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