

## THE THERAPY TRACK

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# Remedies

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### Therapy Track Products: REAL TIME INFORMATION

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## Grow Your Department Just by Keeping Track

You have your staff, your space, your equipment and hopefully some patients – all the pieces to make your department work, right? Wrong. Most directors only think about an operations software system when the bottom line isn't quite working out the way they hoped. And while that's certainly an important time to look for a solution, why not think ahead?

The right operations software can be the most important strategic decision a director makes. It can take all the pieces of your department and make them work together. Do you have the best staff mix? Is your staff maximizing production *and* quality? What goals should be in place to optimize your operations and bottom line, and how do you achieve them? You need a system that is flexible enough to grow with you, that offers real time information, that is easy to use and adapt to your particular department.

### Why choosing the right system is important

A therapy director has enough to worry about without the migraine of an unwieldy program that sucks up hours of your time without ever actually offering any help, a syndrome that plagues all too many software users. The symptoms of system mismatch are easily recognizable: growing pains, staff editing nightmares, blocked access to data, outdated reports, and often a general malaise stemming from the knowledge that it shouldn't be so difficult.

### Will the software system support your department as it grows?

A poor system choice may not actually stunt your growth, but it sure can make it harder. Here are a few threshold questions to ask as you evaluate software systems:

- How easily can I add more users as my staff increases?
- What are the costs of adding more users?
- How will the system handle increased volume of historical data and patient load?
- Can I customize the system to my needs and still have good performance?
- Does the vendor offer special features like automatically generated email reports?

The key here is to avoid lessons learned the hard way. The scenario you want to avoid includes data not available because of local computer crashes, data overload, failed backups, corrupted files and lost data.

### How difficult is it to get started with your new system?

The last thing you want is a new system that is too complicated for you and your staff to actually use. Be sure to consider these basic issues before making a decision:

- Extensive software installation and integration required vs. Internet-based
- Special and costly IT or programming support to make the system work at your location
- The amount of staff and administrative training required
- Availability of support and customization
- Simplicity of log-ins, data entry, and report creation

*the power of real time information!*

## Grow Your Department Just by Keeping Track (cont.)

### Daily use

Even if you choose a great software system, there's no point in having one at all if you and your staff never use it. Consider:

- Can you easily access and use the data on a daily basis?
- Does the system begin to generate meaningful reports immediately, or does it require data input over a period of time?
- Can you access the data from home or another location, 24 hours a day, 360 days a year?

### Empowering Staff

Not only do you need to provide your staff with easy access to data and goals, you need the tools to make that data meaningful and actionable. Staff members' decisions impact your department, so they must be based on accurate and timely data. Questions to ask include:

- How will you see the data you need daily?
- What reports are included with the software? Do they meet your needs now? What about analysis and forecasting?
- Does the software promote teamwork?
- Does it motivate your staff and help them build a history of excellent performance that can help their future careers?

### Flexible enough to meet your needs

Your department's growth means change – the programs you set in place two years ago may now be holding you back. A good operations program needs to be flexible enough to support your department's changes over time. There should be user-selectable choices for staff details, hours, pay rates, target adjustments, cost goals, and services provided and tracked. Here are a few items to consider:

- Will this software dictate how I run my department?
- Is it flexible enough to allow me to change and grow as I want?
- Can I change it myself, or do I need to hire someone to do it?

### Security matters

It is far easier to plan for security early rather than attempt to recover from a security lapse later! Your program should offer secure log-ins, reliable data storage and back-up, ensured privacy for all patient data, and HIPPA compliance.

### Take the long view

A therapy department's operations systems requirements often change over time, becoming more complex, more sophisticated, more robust, or broader in scope and functionality. Points to consider:

- Vendor viability – You want your vendor to be here tomorrow, so look for reliability and good references.
- Solid support – Your vendor should offer free support at the beginning, and affordable, accessible support after that.
- National presence – National benchmark information is invaluable when setting targets and measuring performance.

### Summary

Good planning and careful consideration make all the difference when it comes to choosing the right operations software system for your department. At the end of the day, you cannot improve what you cannot measure, so be sure to pick a program that offers real time information about your department in an easy but powerful and flexible format.

*the power of real time information!*