

MYTH: All Electronic Health Records (EHRs) are interoperable.**FACT: EHR systems may not be able to share information with other systems and may not even use the same language.**

For two electronic health record (EHR) systems to be interoperable, they must be able to exchange patient and related information and then be able to use the information that was exchanged. The current health information technology (HIT) regulatory landscape does not require interoperable systems. Furthermore, EHR systems, for the most part, are not designed to communicate with one another, which means that health information stored in one EHR system may not be accessible or usable by another system. For example, the EPIC EHR system is a closed platform. This means it is difficult for hospitals and other providers that use a different type of EHR system, such as Cerner, to communicate with the EPIC EHR system.

Furthermore, health information is not adequately standardized to allow for seamless exchange. There is vast inconsistency in vocabulary, structure and format used by EHR systems.¹ The Meaningful Use Stage 2 requirements included a definition of a common dataset for all summary of care records and laboratory results, which included uniform terms for certain essential pieces of patient information. However, full interoperability across the health record is not (yet) a requirement for demonstrating meaningful use.

In order to achieve interoperability, there must be standardization of the language used to represent the information being transported, standardized

transmittal or transport standards, and EHR capacity using standardized language and transport mechanisms. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC) standards and certification process is designed to further standardization of the vocabulary and structure for the exchange of patient information through EHRs.²

In order to focus on the broader goal of achieving higher quality patient care, ONC released a “10 Year Vision to Achieving an Interoperable Health IT Infrastructure.” This vision paper describes building blocks and guiding principles for achieving a nationwide interoperable health information infrastructure.³ The primary goal highlighted in the vision paper is to have an interoperable HIT system in place for individuals, providers, and researchers by 2024.

For More Information:

- [See](#) our resources on health information technology.
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¹ Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology, *10 Year Vision to Achieving an Interoperable Health IT Infrastructure*, June 5, 2014. Available at:

<http://healthit.gov/sites/default/files/ONC10yearInteroperabilityConceptPaper.pdf>.

² For more information on ONC HIT Certification Standards, see <http://www.healthit.gov/policy-researchers-implementers/about-onc-hit-certification-program>.

³ *Id.*