



Why are PTs Not Yet Required and Incentivized to Adopt EMR / EHR Systems?

By [Timothy Gendreau](#), Chief Strategist, [The Gendreau Group](#) on April 9, 2015

One reason PTs have not been required to adopt EMR/EHR systems is clear: PTs are not seen as “eligible professions” (EPs) under the 2009 Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health (HITECH) Act.

The HITECH Act relies on the definition of “physician” contained in Section 1861(r) of the Social Security Act, which says:

The term “physician”, when used in connection with the performance of any function or action, means (1) a doctor of medicine or osteopathy... (2) a doctor of dental surgery or of dental medicine... (3) a doctor of podiatric medicine... (4) a doctor of optometry... (5) a chiropractor...

So, Osteopaths and chiropractors are

seen as eligible professional, but DPTs are not. That certainly begs two questions: why not, and what have organizations like APTA been doing to address this?

Whatever the answers, if there is “good news” here, it is only that PTs have not had to deal with the regulations, mandates, and costs associated with rolling out EMR or EHR systems.

But there is also plenty of bad news. For example, PTs have not been able to, in any way, directly benefit from the \$28B that, as a result of the HITECH Act, have thus far been paid to eligible professionals or the organizations they work for to help them implement new EMR systems.

As a result, PTs are not actively involved in conversations about how EMR and EHR systems will be made to integrate and interface with those of other providers or how, in general, healthcare as a whole should evolve to benefit from new computing, mobile, analytics and decisioning technologies.

Today, more than 100,000 physical therapists, physical therapist assistants, and students of physical therapy may have access to software that is useful in managing the delivery of PT, but they have no meaningful access to the electronic medical and health records that hospitals and other providers create and maintain in EMR/EHR systems that have been paid for, at least in part, by \$28B tax dollars – that is, by taxes paid by physical therapists, patients, and providers alike as well as all other US citizens and businesses.

Because PTs are not recognized as eligible professionals, and without the incentives necessary to encourage and support effective and complete adoption of vitally important data and information technologies, the PT discipline as a whole will continue to be seen as second class providers.

And without access to the EMR and EHR records that are created by those designated as “eligible professionals”, PTs will simply not be able to ensure that their patients’ diagnoses, treatment plans, and progress will be properly captured, evaluated, and appreciated for the real health and economic value PTs can create.

So the question remains: **What is going to have to happen to allow PTs to move to the front of the bus where they can be seen and valued for the meaningful and measurable impact that PTs can have on patient outcomes and healthcare costs and economics?**



Timothy Gendreau with The Gendreau Group
www.gendreaugroup.com

Timothy Gendreau will be a speaker at this year’s [IPTCA & PTBA Conference](#) titled **“Strategies Unencumbered.”** During the conference attendees will examine and discuss what it will take to develop the strategies necessary to successfully address declining payments.