5 healthcare tech trends to watch

Keeping up with tech trends is tough, but necessary for practices to remain competitive and deliver modern, quality care.

To help you stay up to speed, here are the five tech trends to know now:

1. **Remote patient monitoring**
2. **Electronic health records**
3. **Devices as a service**
4. **Stronger cybersecurity**
5. **Antimicrobial devices**

Each can help your practice run more efficiently and your patients feel more confident in your care. Read on to learn how.

1

REMOTE PATIENT MONITORING

Remote patient monitoring (RPM) is on the rise, collecting a wider range of health data with increasing accuracy — and it's spreading to the devices patients regularly interact with, like smartphones.

Practices, in turn, are investing more in the development of strong IT infrastructures that can support RPM, whether by increasing bandwidth or building a team of dedicated staff with telehealth training.

RPM: The Benefits

Remote patient monitoring can minimize the need for on-site appointments, increasing access to healthcare while lowering costs. It also has the potential to:

- **Increase diagnostic precision**, providing physicians with a steady stream of medical data via a centralized (and highly organized) platform.
- **Empower patients**, transforming personal devices into health data hubs.
- **Facilitate instant communication**, creating more avenues for patient-physician interactions.
- **Flag new or developing conditions**, allowing physicians and patients to act preventatively.
- **Improve workflow**, using data to drive automated clinical services, like patient reminders.

According to a report released by Berg Insights in 2017, roughly 7 million patients benefit from remote patient monitoring. This number is forecasted to reach 50.2 million by 2021.

RPM and Your Practice

Before introducing RPM to your practice, think deeply about your current IT infrastructure to determine if it can absorb the added workload or if you'll need to grow. Here are a few key logistical points to consider:

- **Bandwidth**. Is an upgrade necessary?
- **Usability**. Will staff and patients need training?
- **Management**. Who will monitor and respond to incoming information?
- **Security**. Are current measures enough?
- **Support**. Will this practice be responsible for helping patients troubleshoot?
- **Compatibility**. Is the software compatible with systems already in place, like EHR?

Remember: Rolling out RPM can mean big changes for your practice — and for your patients. Call on your supplier's IT experts to review your current infrastructure, and to help pinpoint potential problems and opportunities that you might have missed.

2

ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORDS

As cloud computing becomes more commonplace, medical practices are swapping out handwritten charts for electronic health records.

As a result, patient medical records are becoming much more robust, fluid and up-to-date. Meanwhile, healthcare workers are spending less time logging, managing, and sifting through dense patient data.

“There’s a lot of emerging medical software that helps practices really tap into the power of EHRs. For example, software that cross-references patient EHRs with new medications to identify allergies.”

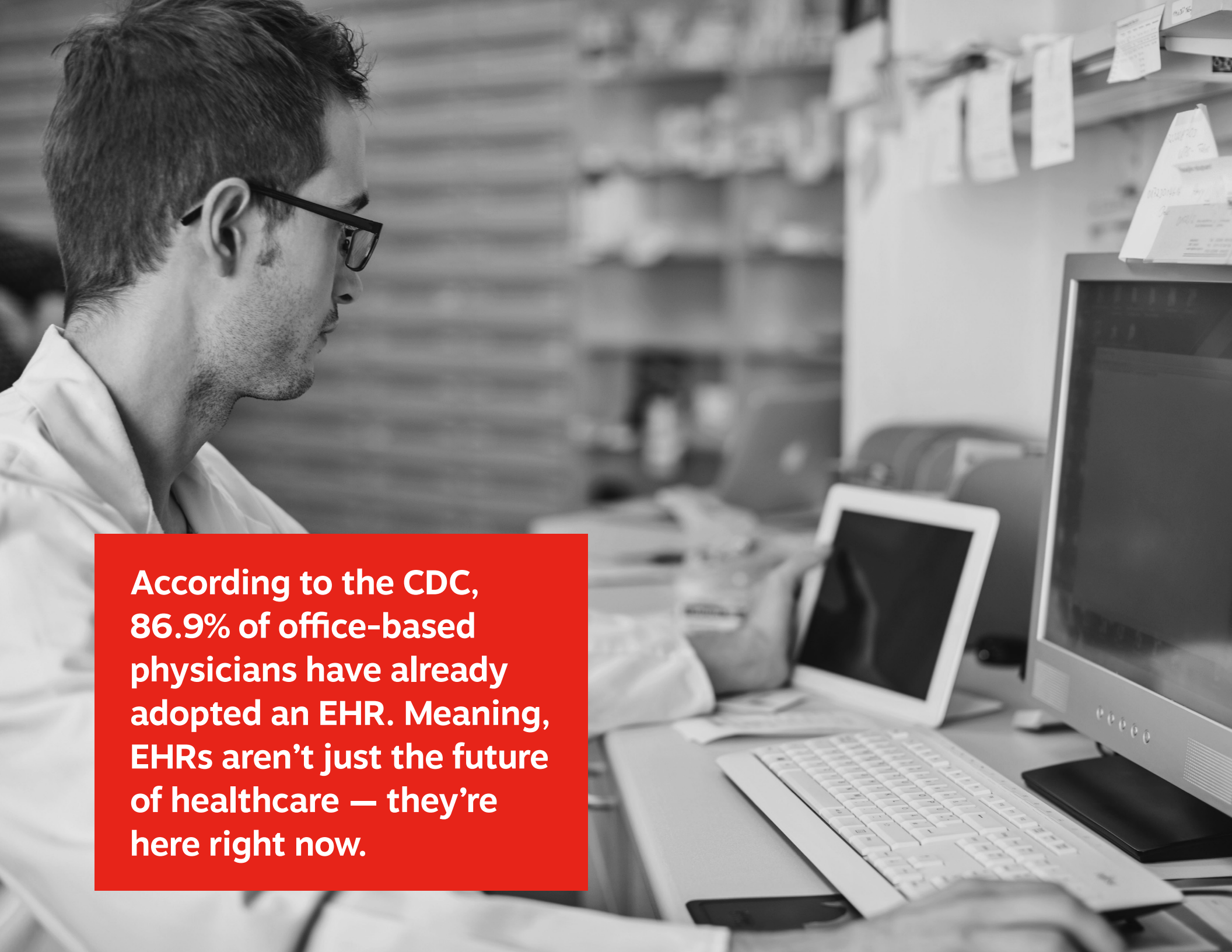
James Clarke
Director of Healthcare Technology
Staples

Electronic Health Records: The Benefits

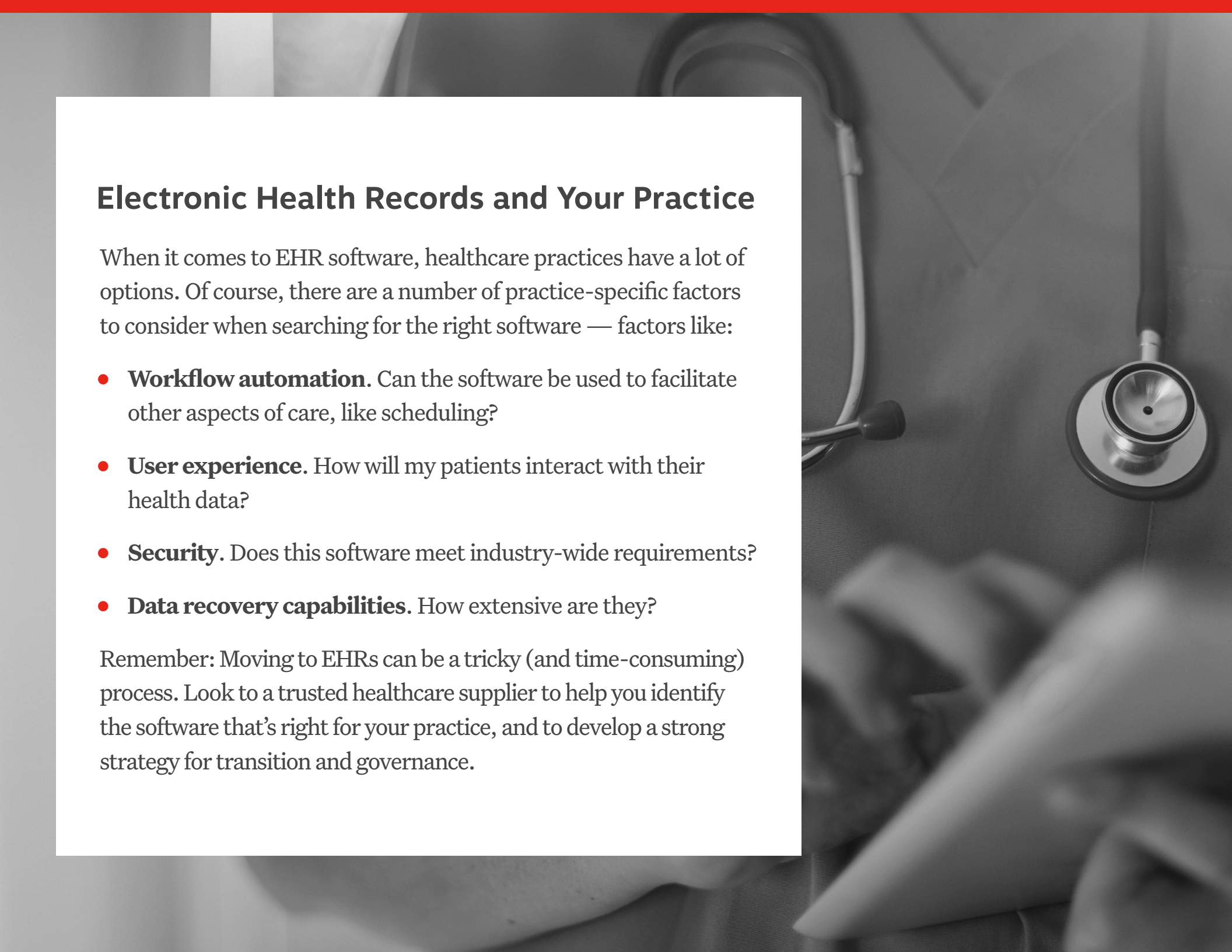
Electronic health records can improve quality of care in a number of ways. Here are a few:

- On-demand access to health data **helps patients feel more empowered and informed**.
- EHRs can be used to **drive other aspects of care**, like electronic prescription management.
- The ability to **share patient information securely** in real-time enhances coordinated care.
- EHRs move with the patient, **making it easier for new physicians to step in swiftly and safely**.
- EHRs have been proven to **lower the risk of clinical error or oversight**.*

*HealthIT.gov



According to the CDC, 86.9% of office-based physicians have already adopted an EHR. Meaning, EHRs aren't just the future of healthcare — they're here right now.



Electronic Health Records and Your Practice

When it comes to EHR software, healthcare practices have a lot of options. Of course, there are a number of practice-specific factors to consider when searching for the right software — factors like:

- **Workflow automation.** Can the software be used to facilitate other aspects of care, like scheduling?
- **User experience.** How will my patients interact with their health data?
- **Security.** Does this software meet industry-wide requirements?
- **Data recovery capabilities.** How extensive are they?

Remember: Moving to EHRs can be a tricky (and time-consuming) process. Look to a trusted healthcare supplier to help you identify the software that's right for your practice, and to develop a strong strategy for transition and governance.

3

DEVICES AS A SERVICE

Because the technology that supports your practice is advancing rapidly, it's never long before a new product (or model) hits the market — and proves a game-changer.

As a result, fewer practices are willing to spring for costly technology that can quickly become outdated. The solution? Pay-as-you-go access to technology and services.

“[Technology] is being replaced at a much quicker pace. So, more businesses are opting to pay a monthly fee to gain access to a device or service. That way, after a period of time, they can upgrade or move on to the next piece of technology — all without having to cough up a lot more money.”

James Clarke
Director of Healthcare Technology
Staples

Devices as a Service: The Benefits

The outright acquisition of new tech can be costly. **A pay-as-you-go business model helps price-sensitive practices stay competitive by increasing access to must-have tools**, like billing software or patient scheduling programs.

Devices as a Service and Your Practice

Before you invest in new technology, talk to your supplier about the healthcare-compliant devices or services available for a monthly fee — this can include everything from patient scheduling software to in-office tablets.

If IT resources are limited, look for packages that include key services, such as maintenance and support. You should also ask providers how quickly the service or device evolves — your practice may not be nimble enough to respond to rapid-fire upgrades.

4

CYBERSECURITY SOLUTIONS

With new technology comes new challenges, like the need for greater cybersecurity.

According to an annual study by the Ponemon Institute, 89% of participating healthcare organizations had suffered a data breach in the last two years.

“Any type of device that’s network-driven or has a specific IP address is liable to be hacked, even a heart monitor. That’s why, beyond security, we stress the importance of consulting and services around that device (like penetration testing).”

James Clarke
Director of Healthcare Technology
Staples

Cybersecurity Solutions: The Benefits

The healthcare industry isn't just rich with information — it's rich with sensitive information, such as social security numbers, medical records, and payment information. Here are a few industry-specific benefits of stronger security:

- **Growth.** Strong cybersecurity allows practices to expand their inventory of connected devices — all of which could otherwise serve as a gateway for a data breach.
- **Savings.** Strengthening preventative systems costs less than recovering from a data breach.
- **Accountability.** Healthcare sees a high rate of information exchange, and a strong cybersecurity system demonstrates a commitment to protect incoming data when collaborating with other health organizations.

According to a recent healthcare cybersecurity report by Infoblox, 85% of healthcare organizations upped their cybersecurity spending in 2017, with 12% reporting an increase greater than 50%.

Cybersecurity and Your Practice

Small to mid-sized healthcare practices are still on the radar for cyber criminals, and federal fines following a breach can be steep if a practice is found to be at fault. Here are a few ways that you can better protect your practice and your patients against cyber threats:

- Limit internal access to data
- Train your staff and create a culture where security is top of mind
- Be diligent about software updates
- Perform routine risk assessments (or, tap a cybersecurity consultant)
- Encrypt, encrypt, encrypt

Finally, take the time to develop a contingency plan, drawing on outside expertise where needed to make sure your practice is prepared.

5

ANTI-MICROBIAL TECHNOLOGY

While antimicrobial technology isn't entirely new, it is evolving.

You may be familiar with microbe-resistant coatings, but antimicrobial properties are now being woven into formerly tough-to-sanitize devices, lessening the risk of contamination, boosting sterilization efforts and extending a product's lifespan.

“We’re seeing an increased emphasis on infectious disease control in the technology market. So, for example, keyboards and monitors are being manufactured with antimicrobial properties so that they can be cleaned and, in some cases, washed.

This is important because infectious disease is one of the largest contributors to readmission — a lot of people will enter a [medical environment] and develop a secondary infection.”

James Clarke
Director of Healthcare Technology
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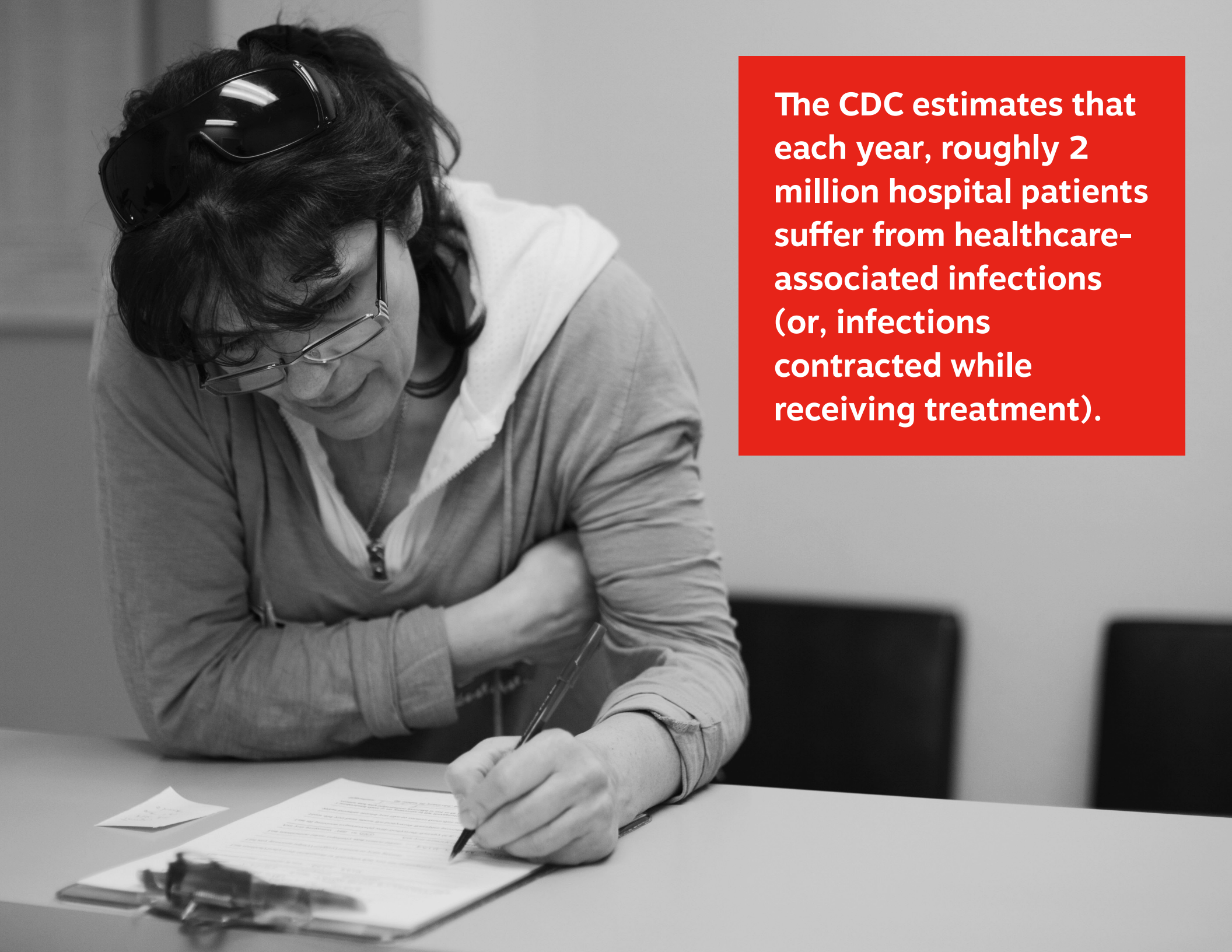
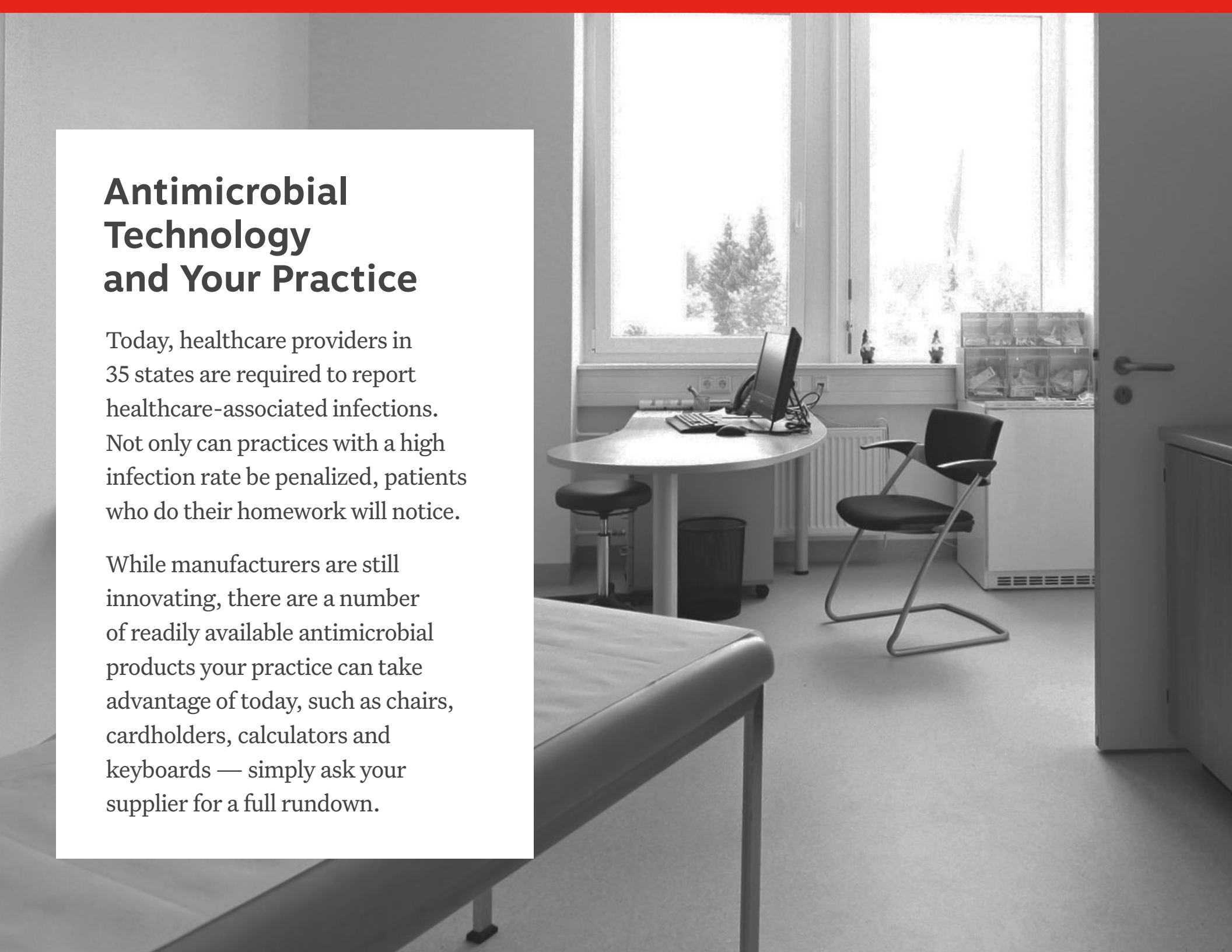


The CDC estimates that each year, roughly 2 million hospital patients suffer from healthcare-associated infections (or, infections contracted while receiving treatment).

Antimicrobial Technology and Your Practice

Today, healthcare providers in 35 states are required to report healthcare-associated infections. Not only can practices with a high infection rate be penalized, patients who do their homework will notice.

While manufacturers are still innovating, there are a number of readily available antimicrobial products your practice can take advantage of today, such as chairs, cardholders, calculators and keyboards — simply ask your supplier for a full rundown.



Keeping pace with tech trends can be tough — especially when your plate is already full with daily work demands. However, when there are measurable benefits to be gained, it pays to be an early adopter.

Let a trusted supplier help you identify the trends that are right for your practice, and to approach innovation in a way that's cost-effective, strategic, and most importantly, good for your patients.

Staples has long served as a tech partner for healthcare facilities small and large.

Visit Staples or call 844-243-8645 to discover how Staples can help design and implement an IT infrastructure that grows with your practice.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