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In order to understand just how far the electronic medical records (EMR) industry has come in terms of process and protocol changes, letâ€™s look back at the history of electronic medical records. Below is an annotated version of how the EMR industry started and important changes up to the present day.

Tracing the Roots of EMRs

The history of electronic medical records is thought to have started with Lawrence L. Weed, a physician who first described the concept in the 1960s. He thought that by automating medical records, the information could be more effectively used to treat patients and quickly provide key information to other specialists or healthcare decision-makers during mission-critical periods where the right data was needed to make important decisions.

From there, his foundational work was then used by the University of Vermont for a project called PROMIS, which was formed from a team of physicians and some of the great minds in information technology during the late 1960s. The result of this work led to the creation of what was called a problem-oriented medical record, also known as POMR, which was implemented in 1970 at the Medical Center Hospital of Vermont. During the same time, the Mayo Clinic was also trying to develop electronic medical records.

Technology rapidly advanced during the 1970s and 1980s portion of the history of electronic medical records. There was the Technicon system for hospitals as well as Harvardâ€™s COSTAR system, which was primarily for records associated with ambulatory care. More patient-oriented electronic medical records systems included The Medical Record by Duke, the HELP system, and the Regenstrief Record.

During the 1970s and 1980s, several electronic medical record systems were developed and further refined by various academic and research institutions. The Technicon system was hospital-based, and Harvard's COSTAR system had records for ambulatory care. The HELP system and Duke's 'The Medical Record' are examples of early in-patient care systems. Indiana's Regenstrief Record was one of the earliest combined in-patient and outpatient systems.

Now, with the advent of stringent HIPAA rules and regulations to protect patient privacy as well as rapid advancement in technology to maximize efficiencies and security, there are dozens of electronic medical records systems, processes, and software packages available with many deployed through healthcare document management outsource providers and service companies that offer highly specialized EMR solutions.

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