Medical Student Exposure to Electronic Medical Records: Is First Year Too Early?
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Purpose: This pilot study was designed to determine the viability of a larger scale initiative examining the implementation of EMR teaching in medical school curriculum.

Methodology: First year medical students at Memorial University were exposed to a fully functioning EMR as part of a Community Health course. Students were given an assignment based around a typical patient encounter and worked within an EMR application to interact with fabricated patients. Reactions to the EMR exposure were noted during a debriefing session.

Summary of Results: Students completed the assignment without application-specific training. A small number of students reported difficulty finding patients in the EMR or an inability to perform some functions (ex., prescribing). Students appreciated the legibility of notes entered by others as well as the ability of the technology to alert them to a potential prescribing error. The EMR interface was busier than that with which the students typically use and they missed things on the screen because of distraction. Students were capable of using the application for rudimentary functions but struggled with the interface to some extent.

Conclusions: EMR's can be used in the medical school curriculum with introduction occurring as early as first year under controlled circumstances. Lengthy training isn’t required if assignments are kept to that of a basic medical encounter. Medical students’ familiarity with technology facilitates their basic use of the EMR application however, training is necessary for more comprehensive use of EMR's in practice.