

# Essential Insight for Your RHO Environment

By Chris Lanaman and David Hallberg

More and more Cerner Millennium® hospitals are becoming remote-hosted organizations (RHOs), which for many can be a smart move. Owning and managing all that EMR system hardware is expensive and demanding. Facilities need a team of skilled staff to manage Millennium's technical and application needs, which are constantly being altered by new code, service packs and patches as well as projects to help applications provide ever-more functionality.

As a director, you carry a heavy burden of responsibility for the system's success and can become the punching bag for user frustration: "The system is slow." "I can't find the order I just placed." "Why wasn't I alerted to the drug interaction?"

You want your equilibrium back.

If your hosting vendor is addressing all your issues quickly and to your satisfaction and if all is now well between your IT staff and clinicians, you can be thankful for your decision to go RHO. In fact, you can also stop reading this article.

## IT director or crisis manager?

We are writing to the rest of you, those who still spend your days moving from crisis to crisis even though someone else is managing your system. Users are still complaining, and they're calling *you*, not the RHO vendor. You're the one down the hall, after all. Not only is the vendor remote in a physical sense, but they might not seem to understand the urgency of your problem – or might not even be able to see the problem. Or they tell you it doesn't qualify as a failure point under your service level agreement, that the metrics show the system is up and available, so there's nothing they can do.

The only equilibrium you've gained is that now the punches are coming at you from opposite sides. Your clinicians stand by their experience and your outsourcer by their metrics. You're in between them wishing for a little more understanding of how the applications are working and for a warning when they start to malfunction. How can you reshape this adversarial triangle into a team united around its mission to deliver quality patient care?

## Understand relationships

The first step is to understand the role each person plays. In most RHO contracts, the RHO vendor takes responsibility for the hardware and for code-level issues. They ensure that your system is running and that it has sufficient resources – enough CPUs, the proper hardware configuration, database availability. If, for example, you are low on servers, the vendor will add instances. In this area, vendors do their jobs well.

Unfortunately, system problems are not limited to CPUs and source code. Millennium is extremely configurable, which means you can change it to fit your unique objectives and workflows. Hospitals have a team of application architects or build specialists working with end-users to tailor the system to their needs. At most sites, it's a never-ending job, and every one of these changes raises the risk of new problems developing. Each time you add a new layer, a new process or a new handoff point you increase the likelihood of a data-delivery failure, possibly in an unrelated area. Our work with clients has shown us that almost all user complaints of system slowness, fluctuation or lost data stem from their unique application build and configurations. Unfortunately for them, the RHO vendor is not involved in the constant changes to all the application builds that are running on the systems they manage and, ultimately, cannot be held responsible for them. When the RHO provider tells you the issue is not their problem, sadly for you, they are right.

## Eat right and exercise

Here's another way of looking at your relationship with your RHO vendor. Suppose you make an appointment to see your physician, Dr. Clark, because you just haven't been feeling like yourself lately. You don't have any acute pain, just a general sluggishness and lack of motivation. Dr. Clark examines you and runs a few tests. The results show that there's nothing wrong with you. Your vital signs, blood work and scans look good. Your system is working as it should.

But, Dr. Clark notes, you have put on a few pounds in recent years. Although your metrics look good, you've become a bit bloated. His prescription? Eat right and exercise. He's sympathetic – he knows it won't be easy and offers some general advice about vegetables and heart rates – but you both know he is not responsible for your weight gain. Nor can he solve it. You have to eat right and exercise for yourself.

That's not the diagnosis you were hoping for. You would prefer a quicker fix, one that someone else could do for you. Now you have to examine your whole lifestyle, sift through an Internet-sized mountain of minutiae on what will work for your particular body: what to eat, what to avoid, how to avoid injury, even what shoes to buy. The doctor thinks you can be back on track in a few months but warns that without a lifelong regimen of healthy choices your body will gain all the weight back ... and more.

Like your doctor's examination of you, your RHO vendor checks your system's vital signs and intervenes when a core system component – an organ – malfunctions. Like the patient, you as IT director are responsible to get your system in shape and maintain its overall health. Like the patient, you can get the information you need, but you will have to

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sift through a mountain of data inside Millennium to figure out what applies to you and then do the work of making the needed changes.

We're pretty sure this is not the diagnosis you wanted to hear. But it's a reality that will help you move forward to solving your problems. How then do you proceed, especially if your organization lost all or most of your IT problem-solving team when you went RHO? Millennium has the answers, but they're hidden somewhere in the mountains of data associated with multiple technologies. How do you determine what information is important for regaining system performance, and what can you ignore?

### So where's the good news?

An independent and objective examination performed by Millennium system experts can pinpoint the problems and identify the actions you need to take. Without the need to hire any additional staff, you'll have the information you need to address the acute and chronic system issues that will get you back in shape and should be the basis of the maintenance process that keeps your system healthy.

Softtek OnTrack™ provides this type of objective evaluation, along with actionable intelligence for solving both chronic and acute system issues that could be impacting your organization both clinically and financially. OnTrack's analysis gathers key data from your environment, and analysts report their results in an easy-to-follow, actionable format. Our information helps you get your system in shape and keep it working for the long haul as you incorporate it in your change control process.

Some of the key benefits are:

1. **Visibility into your Millennium environment** and reporting of application build and process issues causing clinical and financial risk.
2. **Knowledge of system metrics** that allows you to have data-driven conversations with your IT staff, application analysts, consultants and RHO provider.
3. **Knowledge of system performance** through event alerts and identification of chronic issues in your unique implementation of Millennium applications.
4. **Access to Softtek's knowledge base.** Our system analysts have years of experience both at Cerner and hospitals running Millennium.

Because even remote-hosted organizations are responsible for managing their many application configurations, it's essential to find a trusted partner who can assist in gathering and interpreting key data concerning Millennium's operations. Gaining greater visibility into your system – and understanding what the data is telling you – will ensure you can pinpoint trouble before it spins out of control. Data-driven conversations will forge collaborative relationships that deliver better system performance and a higher quality of patient care within your organization. You will have established a process for many years of healthy living.

**About the authors:** *Chris Lanaman is Director of OnTrack Client Services at Softtek Solutions, Inc., the developer of OnTrack Panther and OnTrack Services, which provide third-party monitoring, management and auditing/assurance of the performance of the Cerner Millennium® EMR system. Lanaman previously served as the Cerner Implementation Manager at Carondelet Health Network in Tucson, AZ, where he led the team through two major code upgrades. He also spent six years as an analyst at Cerner. David Hallberg is a systems analyst at Softtek with 14 years of experience working with organizations in the United States and around the world to help them implement Millennium and manage its operations.*

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