



# Addressing Five Common Myths and Misconceptions About EHR Cloud Migration

*Solution provider selection is key to successfully deploying cloud-based EHRs*

**A**s the healthcare industry continues to shift to a value-based care model, healthcare organizations (HCOs) are transitioning their EHR systems, such as Epic, from on-premises data centers to the cloud. Those making the move gain improved agility to scale up and down as needed, more efficient use of employee time, increased investment in innovation versus operations and more.

What once were serious concerns about moving EHR systems to the cloud are simple considerations today. With the right cloud provider, the transition will be seamless, and migration issues will be identified before they impact your business. If your HCO hasn't already begun its cloud journey, now is the best time to start the conversation.

But, despite the evident cloud benefits, there are those who still hold on to old ideas about the perils of moving from on-premises to the cloud. This brief responds to five of the most common myths and misconceptions that prevent health IT leaders from realizing the true value of cloud.

## **1** Cloud migration is too expensive

As part of any cloud decision, you need to weigh the costs of the solution against the estimated ROI. Business value is not only monetary, but also includes your medical staff and IT

team's time, as well as the ability to deliver high-quality patient care and achieve key benchmarks, said Lee Kim, Director of Thought Advisory, HIMSS.

The move to the cloud is an investment, but one that will reap dividends down the road. According to an IDC Solution Brief, sponsored by Virtustream, healthcare leaders "cited cost

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LEE KIM | Director, Thought Advisory | HIMSS

and operational efficiencies related to moving to a cloud-based infrastructure.”<sup>1</sup> One study participant reported conducting a cost analysis that showed running Epic in the cloud (i.e., the Virtustream model) cost \$1.5 million less than operating on-premises.<sup>2</sup>

HCOs that thrive will be those that recognize the need to flex up and down capacity and shift care across modalities, including virtual health platforms. When evaluating the true cost of cloud, make sure you have an apples-to-apples comparison versus what you are running on-premises today – inclusive of backup, encryption, security services, application management, etc.

## **2** The timing just isn’t right

Cloud adoption enables, and is often a catalyst for, an HCO’s digital transformation. However, the value will never materialize unless the organization is willing to take the first step.

The advice is simple: Begin the conversation. Cloud deployment does not happen overnight. Planning and evaluation are critical parts of the process and can be started even if the timing isn’t right due to other recent investments, such as a hardware refresh.

Talk to customers who have migrated to the cloud and understand both the challenges they faced and the benefits they received, Kim said. Take this feedback from your peers into account and embrace your future cloud vision even if a potential move cannot be accomplished in the short term (e.g., 3-6 months).

## **3** Cloud migration will disrupt our staff and business

Health systems that pursue cloud migration often derive a tangible benefit from their cloud journey, specifically around their ability to refocus and redeploy staff toward innovative and strategic patient-centric initiatives.

There are also concerns about the impact of migration and training on workflow. “This is dependent upon the number of [staff] hours versus availability of current staff, especially if manual entry of data is required,” Kim said. “There is also a learning curve for the EHR solution, as well, so it’s best to inquire about training options.”

The pandemic created a groundswell of activity for HCOs that were not only responsible for their current staff, but also supporting the frontline defense workers in the communities they served. Early cloud adopters limited both staff and business disruption during this turbulent period of time by leveraging the benefits of cloud, such as high availability, performance and scalability. This was especially evident if their cloud provider also acted as a managed services provider (MSP), taking on the day-to-day maintenance of their EHR environment.

Working with the right provider, who uses best practices to develop the right migration strategy, limits disruption to both the staff and the business, enabling you to utilize cloud technologies and get ahead of future, business-impacting hurdles.

## **4** I don’t want to give up control over the environment

Your cloud provider doesn’t simply become a tool for infrastructure provisioning, they become a trusted partner along your cloud journey, from planning, through migration, through go-live operations. Kim recommends carefully reviewing service-level agreements from your cloud provider and, as appropriate, their data center, in terms of uptime, availability, geographic locations, etc., and determining whether these are adequate for your organization.

“Outsourcing data or applications to a cloud provider does not mean you should be ‘hands-off,’” Kim said. “You need to conduct due diligence and monitor the vendor’s performance. You are ultimately responsible for the confidentiality, integrity and availability of your patients’ information.”

In other words, substitute control with clarity. Demand transparency from your partners. The right solution providers will be able to deliver easy-to-understand, near real-time, contextual visibility into your compute and storage consumption, security alerts, intrusion attempts, open vulnerabilities and more.

This should be even more prevalent when selecting a cloud partner for EHR migration. Cloud comes with shared responsibility, and you should understand what your solutions provider is willing to do and what you are required or expected to do, especially when adding value with an MSP.

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## 5 The cloud is not secure and lacks compliance

Industry-leading healthcare cloud providers have considerably extended their security and compliance capabilities over the past several years. For compliance, it is a given that any cloud platform you are considering must have HIPAA, HITECH and HITRUST compliances in place with regularly cadenced audit cycles to ensure they are meeting the high standards for protected health information.

However, when evaluating cloud as a potential option, most HCOs underestimate the security potential of cloud, which often ends up being stronger than anticipated due to recent advancements. The healthcare cloud security conversation has evolved from ensuring that a base level of security and compliance is in place, to now determining how you can work together with a trusted cloud provider to build a proactive security posture that can detect, prevent and respond to threats before they become incidents.

Once you are secure in the cloud, HCOs are able to focus on other key priorities, such as performance, scalability, innovation, uptime and more.

### Critical steps to take during the due-diligence process

According to Kim, HCOs should include the following five questions in the due-diligence process when assessing a potential cloud partner for EHR migration and hosting:

1. What industry experience does the vendor have with migrating, hosting and managing mission-critical healthcare systems? “All cloud providers are not created equal,” Kim said. “Only a handful have been in business for a number of years, and privacy and security postures vary.”
2. Does the solution provider have a robust incident response and disaster recovery plan?
3. What is the uptime and availability of the cloud-based EHR solution,

and what is the maximum tolerable downtime for your organization?

4. What is customer/technical support like? Is there 24/7/365 support?
5. How personalized is their cloud delivery, and what customer experience can they leverage as proof they can ensure a smooth migration and deployment?

In order to start planning for EHR cloud migration, it is imperative that HCOs map their current environment and the interconnectivity of their EHR system and otherwise, Kim said: “Understand the staff presently needed to support the existing EHR solution and what staff you need to support the new EHR cloud solution.”

To learn more about Virtustream’s Healthcare Cloud solutions, visit [virtustream.com/healthcare-cloud-solutions](https://virtustream.com/healthcare-cloud-solutions).

#### References

1. IDC Business Value Solution Brief sponsored by Virtustream, The Business Value of Running Epic and other Applications in the Virtustream Healthcare Cloud, IDC Doc. #US47201221, January 2021. <https://www.virtustream.com/lp/idc-business-value-healthcare>.
2. Ibid.

#### About Virtustream

Virtustream LLC, a Dell Technologies business, is the enterprise-class cloud company that is trusted by organizations worldwide to migrate and run their mission-critical applications in the cloud. For enterprises, service providers, healthcare organizations and government agencies Virtustream’s xStreamCare Services™ expertise combined with the Virtustream xStream® Management Platform and Infrastructure-as-a Service (IaaS) meets the security, compliance, performance, efficiency and consumption-based billing requirements of complex production applications in the cloud – whether private, public or hybrid.

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