Volume 2 / Issue 2 2007 - Editorial

Letter from the Executive Director, HITM

Dear Reader,

Isolated communities pose a special challenge for the European model – to provide access and deliver highquality healthcare to everybody, everywhere. Telemedicine already offers some solutions. As revealed by our Cover Story, the emerging e-Health wave promises far more.

e-Health projects such as the Baltic Health Network demonstrate the inherent connection between crossborder and borderless, and potential links between new, pervasive IT technologies and universal healthcare. These, in turn, will build the foundations of the future healthcare eMarketplace. Alongside the strengthening of investment in innovation and healthcare IT research, such a vision is integral to the European Union's i2010 program.

Meanwhile, what will be the real-world impact of such frameworks and super-structural trends ? In other words, how does a healthcare IT professional's experience of ground realities square with such visions ?

This issue of HITM provides expert opinions on the challenge of tomorrow's digital hospitals, in the face of today's healthcare concerns. Included are features on the strategic challenges facing healthcare IT, a management analysis of intelligent infrastructure at Belfast City Hospital, the outsourcing of a Helsinki hospital's IT infrastructure, as well as an in-depth review of a modernisation program at Norway's St. Olav's Hospital. St. Olav's is the largest-ever IT project in the Nordic Region – known as much for its worldclass healthcare as its high-technology infrastructure, and the subject of this issue's Country Focus.

One everyday gadget in tomorrow's e-Health-friendly digital hospital will no doubt consist of speech-recognition devices, which are reviewed in our Product Comparison section. Speech-recognition technologies have leaped leagues ahead over the past decade. They are not only convenient but also boost the accuracy of information gathering and sharing - whether this is used for patient care, or in administrative operations such as billing and reimbursement.

Big, as everyone knows, is not necessarily beautiful. Neither is it always so. In fact, the line between grand and grandiose is sometimes quite thin. The world's largest non-military IT programme, to overhaul the British National Health Service (NHS), currently faces considerable controversy. A Parliamentary Committee has questioned whether the programme will meet its targets – on cost, schedules and clinical benefits. Dr. Jan K. Melichar, a British physician, explains why.

In parallel, we provide an interview with a key IT contractor in the NHS overhaul, Indian IT services giant Tata Consultancy Services, and an HITM assessment of India's presence in the world IT league table. This has so far been underestimated in Europe. It may however have particular implications for healthcare IT, especially since few have so far taken serious account of the complexity, skills and manpower requirements of the European e-Health program.

In his critique of the NHS IT modernisation project, Dr. Melichar calls it a "top-down grand plan" that "will not deliver" since it has not involved "those on the ground".

Does this scenario also extend to Europe's e-Health plans, especially in the context of some of the hyperambitious projects likely to be part of the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) ?

It may be too early to make a guess on this question. However, it will evidently be crucial to have an answer in the years ahead.

At HITM, we plan in our forthcoming issues to focus upon a potentially major threat to such grand visions - namely, the looming problem of legacy

IT systems in Europe's healthcare environment.

Yours faithfully,

Christian Marolt

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