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Letter from Executive Director, HITM

Dear Reader,

In a modern business context, one of the most distinctive features of information technology is the fact that it can add efficiency and value across an entire swathe of processes and specific operational disciplines. Clinical workflow design is, in some senses, the keystone for the healthcare IT arch, and clinical information systems (CIS) are the subject of this issue's cover story. We provide personal accounts by two experts in the CIS field, one from Europe and another from the US.

We are now more than halfway through the first decade of the 21st century. The decade opened in a turbulent fashion, with 9-11 and the Dotcom Bust which brought some of the excesses of Silicon Valley down to earth. Today, one can safely say that the IT industry is less glitzy and more mature.

Before the Dotcom Bust, a concept like the 21st century hospital may have been little more than high-flying hype. That is certainly not the case with Asklepios Klinik at Barmbek, the German hospital featured in this issue, which imaginatively combines design, processes, and technology to foster an optimal environment for standardised, interoperable healthcare technology, and move from an institutional system to a patient-oriented informational approach.

Indeed, although healthcare has recently been at the forefront of technological change, the bulk of developments have been in the areas of patient therapy and care. Innovations in the area of IT systems have been less apparent, although these offer the greatest promise in enhancing delivery of healthcare, and capping growth in healthcare costs. Most major IT firms, on their part, have for now adopted a mix of approaches to what will no doubt be a major business opportunity – and an equally impressive challenge, given the host of new regulatory standards in the pipeline. This issue of HITM provides an overview of developments in healthcare IT at some of the world's leading firms.

Several other features are addressed in this issue. These include an overview of satellite technologies as a means to address e-Health infrastructure shortcomings in isolated communities, as well as a primer to the Electronic Health Record (EHR). Moves towards the EHR are expected to acquire considerable momentum through the year, and we will be providing routine insights on this subject and commentaries by experts.

The issue also has two features on an everpresent challenge in healthcare IT, namely quality. In particular, we provide an expert's overview on the meaning of Six Sigma in the context of healthcare and healthcare IT, and its promise of patients reaping great benefits. Following on directly is an analysis of change management, with a focus on the implementation of Six Sigma practices in the hospital environment.

Yours sincerely,

Christian Marolt

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