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Letter from the Secretary General and Editor-in-Chief, HITM

Dear Reader,

In several editorials and features over the past years, Healthcare IT Management has advocated the need for a European face to healthcare IT. We have argued that more than industrial policy or simple feel-good, such issues relate to fundamental questions about healthy business, scientific continuity, and the European way of life.

The challenge is clear. The creative juices of innovation do not lie in policy. The birth of new ideas cannot be left to politicians, playing midwife. Neither can civil servants be the babysitters tasked with nurturing the infant called innovation.

What both politicians and bureaucrats can do is to protect innovation from being thrown to the wolves. And this is an area where Europe, more specifically European healthcare IT, needs attention.

We are not chauvinists. We seek to be realists. We do not believe that the emerging world of healthcare IT will necessarily be aligned with the unique European Welfare State model – where equity and efficiency are two sides of the same coin. This is not the American way, nor the Chinese or the Indian.

Students of the history of science know about both the European, Roger Bacon, and the American, Thomas Kuhn.

Bacon focused on incremental innovation. He wrote about ants (their painstaking step-by-step job of improving the way things work), and spiders (who organised) this into something bigger. This is a European gift. Testimony to it lies in the iconic global value of that engineering brand: 'Made in Germany'.

Kuhn described paradigm shifts, those earthshaking transformations by which technology reshapes the world. Since the middle of the 20th century, this has been the domain of the Americans. However, many such transformations were driven by Europeans, who went to the United States. The atomic bomb was the handiwork of Germans, an Italian, an English-origin New Zealander and a Dane. The more powerful Hydrogen Bomb was developed by a Hungarian. NASA's Father, too, was a German: Werner von Braun led the team for the Saturn V rocket, which propelled the astronauts on Apollo 11 to the moon. And we know about the Englishman Tim Berners-Lee and the Internet.

Tomorrow's healthcare paradigm shifts, such as nanotechnology, robotics, biochips and supercomputing, may well have their roots elsewhere. Many gurus in enabling areas – from RFID to image compression and encryption algorithms – are still Americans, but not necessarily from Europe. Urobot, the first prototype robot for minimally invasive surgery, was developed by Nanyang Technological University in Singapore.

In this context, we at Healthcare IT Management were encouraged by the response to *IT@Networking 2009*, organised at the end October by the European Association of Healthcare IT Managers and the European Association of Hospital Managers.

This event, the first-ever of its kind, aimed at providing recognition to imaginative European innovators – those who have designed and implemented new solutions with the potential to shake up the healthcare IT landscape, both in Europe itself and beyond its borders.

IT@Networking 2009 drew an encouraging response. The breadth and technical depth of the 50-plus entries, from across the continent, was overwhelming. On her part, EU Commissioner for the Information Society and Media, Viviane Reding, applauded the initiative as a means to further develop and deploy innovative e-health solutions.

I began by referring to the need for a 'European Way'. *IT@Networking 2009* was an attestation to the fact that there are many of us, in the healthcare IT industry, in hospitals and universities, and at the European Commission, who endorse this. More details about the event are provided in the following pages of this issue. Both the European Association of Healthcare IT Managers and the European Association of Hospital Managers plan a follow-on *IT@Networking 2010*.

Yours truly,

Christian Marolt

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