

Volume 4 / Issue 3 / 2009 - Features

The European Centre for Healthcare Technology

On the occasion of the first anniversary of the European Centre for Health Technology, HITM's Yana Konstantinova interviewed Kåre Finbak, the Managing Director of this Health Centre of Excellence. Mr. Finbak is also the Director for Business Development at HP Norway.

Mr. Finbak, We Have Understood That Recently There Were Some Changes in the Management of the European Centre for Health Technology and You Have Been Appointed as Managing Director of This Centre. Did You Feel Prepared for this Position?

Yes, I have been appointed to the position of Managing Director in March 2009. I did feel prepared as my career over the last twenty-five years at HP Norway was mostly in management positions. My work consisted of planning business development and preparing strategic projects.

The European Centre of Health Technology is a global centre for HP, situated in Norway. We have customers from all over the world. The Centre coordinates numerous global visits and activities. For example, in August, we are expecting visitors from Canada, Australia, US and Italy.

Do You See the Centre More as a Demonstration Site for the Latest Healthcare IT Technologies or as a Place for Investigating and Resolving Challenges? Or Both?

The vision and mission of the Centre is twofold. On one side, it is a place for demonstrating the latest IT healthcare solutions and technologies, as implemented at St. Olavs Hospital and Ahus Hospital in Norway. On the other side, it is a competence centre for testing new ideas and solutions prior to their selling and implementation.

What are the Backgrounds of the Key People at the Centre: Technical Experts, Academics, Marketing People Seconded From Your Corporate Backers, Hospital Professionals?

The background of the people involved in activities and visits to the Centre differ. We have technical experts in different solution areas, sales and marketing people and also project specialists that have been part of the St. Olav's hospital and Ahus implementation projects. There are people involved from all our partners. Cisco, Imatis, Telenor, Microsoft and HP are the major players.

So Far, What Would You Say Your Greatest Successes Have Been?

We have had visitors from different regions. Australian, European, American and of course several Norwegians. The visitors have been from hospitals, construction companies, politician from local and central government and press. The huge interest in the Centre has exceeded our expectations.

Concretely, You Saw Yourselves as 'a Window' to the Future of Healthcare. Are You on Track?

We can probably never say that we are "on track" since the technology and solution areas to increase effectiveness and efficiency in hospitals are huge. The challenges with reduced number of available recourses at the same time as the population is growing older will make the focus on IT solutions even stronger. What we have accomplished though is to concretely show and explain what the two hospitals in Norway, which are probably at the leading edge in implementing IT solutions, have accomplished.

What is the Outlook for the Next Year For Your Centre, and in the Longer Term, Say Over the Next 5 Years?

The first step is to move the Centre to one of the two mentioned hospital, so as to really get integrated within the hospital. Both hospitals can provide the visitors the possibility to combine a visit to the Centre and the hospital in a better way. Secondly, we plan to have joint R&D activities with the hospital and the University in the area, as both hospitals are University hospitals.

Are You Still Satisfied in Your Choice of Norway as the Place to Base Yourself? Does the Fact That This is a Non-EU Country Help or Hurt Your Efforts, Say in the Field of Standards, Best Practices etc. Or is it Neutral?

I would say neutral. The two hospitals are at the forefront in implementing healthcare IT solutions. Norway is, as you say, not part of the EU but is an EEA member bound to the same legal aspects as EU members. As I have said before, the visitors of the Centre are global and necessarily not only from within the EU. The decision on placing the Centre in Norway was not driven by these factors, but more which country was most fit to be the host of the Centre.

On a Corporate IT Systems Level, You Have HP and Cisco in Your Core Team. We Expect that the EDS-HP Merger Must Have Impacted on Your Centre in Terms of Bringing in a Pure Play IT Services Company into Your Orbit. Is This True? Can You Explain?

At the moment the integration of EDS has not impacted the Centre as no changes have been done. We are in the process of investigating how the EDS solutions in the health care business are fitting the Centre's strategy.

On the Other Hand, are You Not Growing Too Big? HP, EDS and Cisco. We Would Expect Healthcare IT People at IBM and Microsoft Must be Concerned.

I do not think this is an issue. Competitiveness is good for the market and it is stretching the vendors. We are in some markets cooperating and in other markets competing. There are also beside the mentioned vendors other strong competitors in this segment.

There are Other Similar Initiatives, and in Faraway Places. GE Healthcare has Announced a Month Ago That it is Opening a Virtual Hospital in India, its Biggest Worldwide, to Test New Technologies. Right Next Door, Intel has its Largest Design Centre, as do SAP and Philips, and Not Least IBM That is Doing a Lot of its SoA Work There Too. Even HP and EDS have Major R&D Operations, Possibly Much Larger Than Their European Ones, as Does Oracle – Now Bolstered by Sun. What do You Believe Will be the Impact of all This?

The Centre we have established is run as a Global Centre on behalf of HP and it is also linked with our WW Health initiatives, including R&D in this area. There are, as you say, similar initiatives from different vendor and vendor collations both in the IT industry and also in the technical medical equipment where GE is one of the major players. We have, and will have, cooperation with vendors in the other areas of hospital solutions.

Which IT Healthcare Solutions are Being Tested in the Centre at the Moment?

At the moment the Centre works with Imatis in developing solutions. Microsoft has more general solutions in healthcare. There is positioning system equipment from Sonitor, which is based on ultrasound. Tandberg offers media conferencing, a system to be able to share patients' pictures from one hospital to another. The EG's Endoscope system is linked to the IMATIS system in order to show that you can implement technological medical equipment in the solution.

At the Centre, we work with the Swedish company Bodycomp and we have a remote heart monitoring system called

Kiwok, which allows the patient to be monitored by the hospital in his/her home and have the results sent by cell phone. We have also implemented the MAS (Medical Archiving System) from HP, which will help the hospitals to archive and store huge quantities of data in a secure way, and retrieve the same data whenever needed.

As the Managing Director of the European Centre for Health Technology, do You Feel Europe is Making its Voice Adequately Heard? And That Policy Makers are Listening?

In Fact, There is a Lot of Duplication Going Round in Big Ticket Projects.

We Believe, all Too Often, Europe Gets Hurt Both Ways. Individual EU Members do Not Count for Much, at Least as Far as the Big Programmes Like E-Health are Concerned. Meanwhile Others – Small Breakthroughs Mainly – do Not Get Noticed. What Would You See as the Way Forward?

I fully support your thoughts. We see the duplications across countries but even within a country. It is a challenge to leverage success at one hospital, even within the same country. Politicians work too close with one vendor or a coalition of vendors due to the competition law within the country or EU. This is, as far as I see it, a hindrance for standardisation and an increase in efficiency and also a cost for the community.

Published on : Wed, 4 Mar 2009