

## Volume 3 / Issue 5 / 2008 - Editorial

### The Letter from the Executive Director and Editor-in Chief, HITM

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Dear Readers,

It seems that exciting times lie ahead for healthcare IT. As policymakers and health system managers seek to improve business processes and contain costs, there is a growing consensus that more intelligent, innovative and integrated healthcare systems are just around the corner. Our cover story reviews the state of play in healthcare IT in Europe, in light of increased public expectations for more customer-friendly healthcare.

Meanwhile, a feature on healthcare IT in the US, its challenges and promises – as well as the need to look at ‘soft’ issues such as patient empowerment rather than cost and quality alone – are discussed in an exclusive feature by Robert Roswell, a University Professor of Medicine and a former Under Secretary of Health at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The VA is widely credited with developing one of the first successful national electronic health record systems.

In spite of the financial crisis and the risk of recession, healthcare seems likely to be the only major business sector to see an increase in IT spending. According to a survey by Datamonitor, 57% of companies plan to increase spending on healthcare IT in 2009, in contrast to more than 60% (a record) who plan to cut budgets or keep it flat. Evidence of this is also present in an inhouse analysis by Healthcare IT Management on the annual US stockmarket performance of five key healthcare IT-related sectors.

In two of the largest, medical instruments and medical appliances, we found the share price fall to be considerably below the Dow Jones Industrial Average. In addition, the spread in percentage declines for the largest firms was tight. This is a good indicator of the health of the sector, in terms of the irreversibility of investment plans by buyers and the relative tightness of vendor choice.

In spite of the positive outlook on healthcare IT, hopes about easy money should be quickly discarded. Healthcare IT managers and CIOs are, in the coming years, likely to face considerable pressures in justifying investments in healthcare IT – before they are made. The issue of return on investment (RoI) – hitherto confined to sectors like manufacturing and retail – has recently begun emerging in the field of healthcare IT, and as discussed in our Management section, is likely to acquire greater prominence in the near future.

We also provide features on the fast-growing trend of Software as a Service (SaaS) and an analysis about the techno-philosophical debate in EHRs – on privacy and security versus the seemingly contrary demand of interoperability. Other features cover IHE (Integrating the Healthcare Enterprise) profiles in the key application of cardiology and the growth in convergence between medical technology and IT. Such emerging, fast-developing topics will be an integral part of coverage by Healthcare IT Management in 2009.

Following central Europe in the previous issue, our Country Focus this time is on eastern Europe. Alongside our customary overview of five countries (Bulgaria, Lithuania, Romania, Serbia and Ukraine), we also provide a close-up portrait of the new EHR system in Serbia and an analysis of healthcare IT in Romania, a country whose rich tradition in the field of computers underpins its status as a hub of Europe’s offshore IT.

This issue marks the close of our third year in print. It also coincides with the first General Assembly of the European Association of Healthcare IT Managers, due to be held in Copenhagen during the World of Health IT ‘08.

Yours truly,

**Christian Marolt**

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