

2004: The Year that Launched the Decade of Healthcare IT

An industry perspective by Siemens Medical's Tom Miller, president of the company's information technology business.

The whole healthcare process – from prevention to diagnosis and treatment through rehabilitation and care – must be optimized in order to achieve maximum efficiency. All the stakeholders in healthcare must keep this goal in mind and work toward better quality and higher transparency. Modern information and communication technologies (ICT) help deliver medical and patient-specific data where it is needed.

Who would have predicted that healthcare information technology would finally draw America's attention – politically and in the mainstream media – in 2004? Yet, when President Bush uttered the words "electronic health record" in his January 2004 State of the Union address, it appeared that our industry had indeed arrived. And this is a trend that can be observed all over the world. The European Commission has offered support for its member states to introduce international interoperable platforms. For this reason the commission has assigned an independent group of stakeholders to identify standards and to give direction on how to establish interoperability between different systems.

In 2004, the introduction of a strategic framework for the achievement of interoperable EHRs in the United States within the next 10 years placed healthcare IT firmly in the forefront of the political agenda. Across the healthcare industry, we proclaimed that the decade of healthcare IT was upon us. Vendors and healthcare organizations alike quickly rallied and began the first tentative steps toward the collaboration required to make the EHR a reality.

As we usher in 2005 and embark on year two of the journey, cooperation and goal setting must continue to be our driving force. While the vendor community must compete, we must also collaborate. There is no other course for achieving our collective vision of an interoperable, connected healthcare community. Healthcare fragmentation must be eliminated and devices must work together.

But for all the industry goodwill and collaboration being generated through participation in consortiums, certification, and standard-setting efforts, the critical funding to make this electronic overhaul of healthcare a reality has not yet appeared. We must resolve and accept that this will be an incremental process,



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PATIENT information: available anytime, anywhere with appropriate security access.

initial system failures. But hospital CEOs are losing patience with the industry and many are contemplating the temporary trade-off of cutting-edge functionality for ease of implementation and the impeccable performance of basic functionality.

While others may see this as a barrier, we view it as an opportunity. By redoubling our efforts on quality of product and implementation methodology, we can provide a bridge to the future without pain in the present. We'll accomplish this by continuing to deliver innovation and by focusing on all of the "ilities" of our products. What we internally refer to as "ilities" are what we – and hospital CEOs – require as the fundamental core of every system:

- Flawlessly efficient functionality
- Ease of installability and implementability
- Interoperability with other systems to facilitate exchange of information without bounds
- Consistent reliability and constant availability, as well as seamless supportability and the capability to be remotely hosted
- Affordability, upgradability, and scalability enabling evolution to the future

The company that does all of this while continuing to relentlessly build toward the future of healthcare technology will be dominant. And that will be Siemens. In spite of our daily challenges that often leave us wondering how we will get it all done, I am thrilled to work in this industry, and for Siemens, at this time. We are at the center of the development of medical technology that has the potential to transform healthcare as radically as did anesthesia or penicillin. We will be at the forefront of creating technology that will lead to more affordable care, with better prevention, earlier diagnosis, targeted therapies, and better clinical outcomes for every individual patient – care that I would like available for my own children.

We can never lose sight of our goal of providing the highest quality software that transforms information technology into a powerful medical tool – because we believe information is good medicine. Here's to a whole new year of possibilities.

funded over time. There is already tremendous work underway, significant progress being made, and still much more to accomplish. Today, the healthcare IT industry has perfected the art of data capture. The next goal is to surpass the simple productivity gains of workflow automation to achieve an unprecedented level of workflow optimization. That will culminate in perfecting the management of information-moving through the healthcare continuum in an effective and meaningful way – and analyzing and using the information to continuously improve the processes involved in today's standards of care. That will be healthcare IT's most significant achievement. However, at the same time, I believe that the new year will usher in a trend that we are just beginning to feel. The conventional wisdom remains that the implementation of a powerful IT system requires deep pockets, tolerance of institutional disruption, and years of organizational effort – and should be accompanied with tolerance for frequent