



2004 will demonstrate on-the-ground benefits of electronic health records for Canada

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2003 was a year of many health care challenges. Most notably, the SARS outbreak opened Canadians' eyes to the stresses on the public health system and underscored the need to access the right information at the right time.

In his assessment of Canada's response to SARS, Dr. David Naylor, Dean of Medicine at the University of Toronto, highlighted a number of deficiencies, among them "the absence of protocols for data or information sharing among levels of government, and the weak links between public health and the personal health services system."

This observation was echoed by Dr. François Bélanger, President of the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians, and Elma Heidemann, Executive Director of the Canadian Council on Health Services Accreditation in their responses to Dr. Naylor's report: "SARS has demonstrated clearly the critical need for integrated communications systems and networks to allow the real-time exchange of information."

Among its many lessons, the SARS experience clearly demonstrated the integral relationship between frontline patient care and IT infrastructure. In the absence of widely available technology capable of identifying and tracking affected individuals, health officials resorted to using multi-coloured post-it notes as a mapping mechanism for establishing linkages between victims-unacceptable in our age of advanced technology.

Fortunately, we know Canada will be better prepared in the future thanks to an unparalleled commitment to develop and accelerate the adoption of electronic health record systems by the federal, provincial and territorial governments, championed by their Deputy Ministers of Health. Through Infoway, their collaborative efforts are helping establish a national infostructure that will enable the real-time, sharing of health care information. This information will be available electronically to authorized health care providers, and to the individual, in support of high quality care wherever and whenever they enter the health care system. Improved health care delivery to the individual Canadian will be the inevitable result.

In the past year, Infoway has invested in developing robust, reusable provider- and client registry applications which allow the assembly of an electronic listing of health care practitioners and automated access to individual patient histories. Having these applications available during the SARS crisis would have resulted in quicker access to the information so urgently needed by public health to manage the crisis.

In 2004, the provider- and client-registry applications will be available and ready for deployment. This will be accomplished with unprecedented speed. We are currently working with the

federal, provincial and territorial governments to have these applications in place across the country over the next 3 years.

We are confident that this is achievable. Our confidence stems from what Infoway and its partners have been able to achieve in the last 12 months. 2003 was critical for building Infoway's momentum. Our members - the Deputy Ministers— unanimously endorsed our multi-year business plan, which lays the roadmap for having the basic elements of compatible Electronic Health Record systems deployed in half the country within the next six years. By almost any measure, the collaborative model on which our business is based yielded exceptional results:

- 22 projects were completed or are underway Canada-wide in just 12 months. These projects focus on developing solutions, and on the standards and architecture required to deploy these solutions quickly and comprehensively. Some of the developed solutions will be ready to be deployed across Canada in the coming year;
- Committed investments of more than \$218M to date, which exceeds Infoway's 03/04 investment target by more than 70%.
- Starter toolkits are already available to speed up readiness for deployment
- In 2004 we expect project activity to be underway in all jurisdictions throughout Canada.

We are on track with our goal of automating have the country in six years. Within just a few short years, Infoway will have developed the tools that provide Canada's health care community with more timely and accurate patient information so necessary for improved diagnosis, treatment and health outcomes. Having these tools in place will help professionals better manage and contain public health epidemics such as SARS and drive better day-to-day health care delivery.

In the process, we will create up to 2,000 health care IT jobs and reinforce Canada's international reputation as a global technology leader.

2004 holds great promise for Canadian health care.

