



- DAVID WATLLING -

## A Healthy Industry is Necessary for Effective Public-private Partnerships

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In my editorial some months ago, I spoke of the need to get our industry organized. I observed *“There are too many cottage industry companies fighting with each other for business, and good people. None are that healthy. What we need to be doing is increasing the size of the pie and creating capacity.”*

Last edition I spoke to the capacity creation problem with respect to people. What I want to focus this issue on is organizing the private sector healthcare IT supplier community to be in a better and stronger position to support the rapid changes in the healthcare and compete effectively at all levels with the US and global players that are poised to gobble up the business.

I believe we are talking about developing a core Canadian asset.

We know that, as Canadians, we identify with our healthcare system (along with other social programs), as a core element that distinguishes Canada from other nations. We also know that we have recognized IT as a key tool to facilitate the reformation and sustainability of the healthcare system we hold so dear. Accordingly we are entering a time of unprecedented levels of spending on healthcare IT.

But do we all know that Canada is renowned worldwide for its innovation in health research, telemedicine, biotechnology and other forms of advanced information technologies? And that Canada is in fact the most wired country in the world?

And yet, IT for healthcare is largely a cottage industry, comprised mainly of small to medium sized companies operating, for the most part, in isolation. Further, foreign IT vendors take the bulk of the market share in the Canadian healthcare environment.

I believe now is the time to bring focus and attention to the industry, to organize the private sector, to provide a unified voice to Canadian governments and to take our message to the world stage.

As we all know, talk is cheap. So a number of Canadian healthcare IT company owners assembled in Vancouver at the eHealth conference and decided to do something. We agreed to form the Canadian Healthcare Information Technology Trade Association (CHITTA) - to be incorporated federally as a not-for-profit association.

We laid out a mission statement - to support the growth of Canada's healthcare ICT companies by bringing focus to this emerging industry and providing for an organized and proactive dialogue with government, policy and investment decision makers.

We identified broad goals in the areas of:

- Establishing the means for industry growth and effective public-private collaborations, e.g. categorizing and profiling the industry and players.
- Informing the stakeholders of the healthcare system about the capabilities and benefits of Canadian suppliers.
- Lobbying, consulting and collaborating with decision makers in the healthcare system with a unified industry voice.
- Ensuring quality and establishing an image of excellence in Canadian healthcare IT products and services, e.g. with respect to standards.
- Building the industry, by growing business domestically and internationally.

We formed an interim volunteer board, comprising senior executives from CareLink, CLINICARE, iW Technologies, Logibec, Momentum Healthware, Procura, Sierra Systems, Triple G, and UNIS LUMIN.

We have solicited and received support from various levels of government in our endeavours. In fact we anticipate tangible (read monetary) support to be forthcoming to enable us to launch the Association effectively. Health Canada has already agreed to sit at our board table as an ex-officio member. We expect Industry Canada to join in the same vein.

Clearly we have a lot of work to do. We need to establish membership criteria, fees, goals and objectives and services. We need to build effective relationships with related associations and groups such as COACH, ITAC, CST, and the like. All items that we need to put more time and attention towards.

Watch for more news and updates as CHITTA gets rolling through the summer.

The Mazankowski report said it best - “We must move from a 19<sup>th</sup> century cottage industry to a 21<sup>st</sup> century service industry.” While Mr. Mazankowski was referring to the health system at large, I believe it applies equally to the healthcare IT industry.

