



Editorial

A Pivotal Era?

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I have the sense that 2008 marks the beginnings of a Pivotal Era – I believe that those who are “old hands” in this addictive industry of ours are coming to the realization that we have been handed the opportunity to succeed on a virtual platter. We have become the benefactors of our success in converting the media and politicians to eHealth thinking.

Great news! But... we now face some significant challenges.

Wattling's column (Page 14) deals with a major one – resources; Covey (page 42) reflects on our ability and competency to execute; Stuart, Wing, and Brown (page 46) caution us on the issues of risk; Seaton, in his first Column as CHITTA president (Page 16), alludes to people in the industry and the value proposition; Maloney, in her COACH Column considers our need to market a positive image for acceptance by consumers and providers alike.

That panorama marks a multiplicity of pivotal changes in virtually all aspects of “our” business. My guess is that in order to have a decent chance of success it will require a planned, executable and focused transition. It can't be “our” business any longer. We've had “our” time, we need to pass it on to the frontline clinicians and care providers, who, when they have had their time, will need to pass it on to the consumer.

When one takes that point of view, it is inescapable that the key is the community physician. If we are right in our assessment that an EMR/EHR is an appropriate tool that will provide care more safely and efficaciously than the paper record and can, in fact, save physicians time, our job in passing the baton should be relatively easy.

Easy, provided that we can articulate a business case where the physician's time/income ratio is not adversely affected. We can measure success, not by “58% of Province X's physicians have access to using an EMR”, but rather by a medical practice culture where physicians won't willingly practice medicine without it.

That culture is exemplified by the successes of Canadian Radiologists – from my point of view that is a brilliant collaboration of physicians, technology, standards, the vendor community, government and Canada Health Infoway.

Let's take a bit of a tangent on the issues of capacity and competence, I think that the issues require review from a broader scope. One area that is not commented on frequently is the entrepreneurial nature of the individuals populating our industry. It is surprising, to some at least, how many “contractors” we have in our business. I am one myself (aside from this magazine), so there are no inferences to be taken.

However, as we move from the start-up phases of eHealth to embracing it into our organizational cultures in order to support our clinicians and frontline care providers, one could hypothesize that there might be some wisdom in re-establishing our human resources as organizational assets as opposed to short/long-term leased or rented assets. That, as Wattling points out, is a major challenge from a recruitment/retention perspective – one of THE the major current concerns of many commercial corporations. For healthcare, I suspect that the investment costs in ensuring the competence and “happiness” of our staff through ongoing training, education, certification and exposure to networking opportunities would be less than the cost of per-diems associated with the contractual alternative. The less measurable benefit is the impact of having an “US” institutional mentality. I will leave that to those who have credentials in organizational behaviour theory and practice.

To be clear, I believe that our goal is or should be to enable care providers to use Informatics tools in their clinical roles; the last thing we need is to reduce our clinical resource capacity by converting them into pseudo-Informaticians.

Let us go public with realized returns on the public's investment rather than the amount we've invested on their behalf. We need to make the case for ROI; the technology is there and will flourish on its own. We have a unique opportunity to collaborate as an “Industry” to “make it happen”. Let's leave our collective egos on the table and get it done.

The stakes are enormous, and time is not our friend. Politicians have four year terms, I'm not sure we do.

As to the media, they go where the headlines go: let's make some! ●