



Last **W**ords

Michael Martineau

Michael Martineau is a Director of the Branham Group in Ottawa

Raising Awareness

As is often the case with my articles, I start with an initial concept and then, just before I sit down to write the article, a new inspiration hits me and I feel compelled to write about it. It was no different for this month's article.

Like most mornings, I got up early, made myself breakfast and sat down to read the newspaper. As my family will attest, I have a particular sequence in which I read the paper. To start, no one in the house gets to read the paper before I do because I like a fresh, crisp newspaper. I pick out the sections that I want read, starting with the business section and followed by the comics and then the main portion of the paper.

I have confessed in previous articles that I am a sit-com junkie. Let me confess in this public forum yet another vice – my daily dose of comic strips. The comics in the Ottawa Citizen are printed in two columns on a single page. I start on the right-hand column first, reading the comics from top to bottom and then start again at the top of the left-hand column. Yes, I can be a little obsessive-compulsive in some of my behaviors

Recently, when I got to the comic strip "Blondie", I was pleasantly surprised to learn that Dagwood's doctor had an EMR! That's right. Perched right on the doctor's desk, facing Dagwood, was a computer monitor. Clearly the comic strip's authors felt that the general public could relate to the idea of a computer in the doctor's office.

Comic strips, like television, reflect the realities of everyday life. Seeing a doctor using a computer in the comics is yet another indication of the degree to which eHealth is becoming a part of our daily lives. It will be interesting to see how soon we find ourselves asking our doctor, like Dagwood did, "How do my pictures look, Doc?"

Now, back to our regularly scheduled article

In the last issue of this magazine, Shelagh Maloney, COACH's President, issued a call to action to all COACH members. She urged each of us to "become advocates for eHealth informatics" by telling "our friend, neighbors and families that implementing EHRs and other technology solutions are one of the best ways to provide them with the tools and the solutions that they and their care teams need to make informed decisions".

I was inspired by this article, though, perhaps not quite in the way that Shelagh intended. While I agree with the basic premise that we need to engage the general public, I don't believe that a grass roots approach of "tell a neighbor, tell a friend" will be particularly effective. Therefore, I suggest a more aggressive approach.

Shelagh points out in her article that "the challenge for us is to create awareness about the benefits of eHealth". Not only do I agree with Shelagh but I also believe that creating this awareness is key to getting increased funding for eHealth projects. If we want more public funding, let's convince the public that spending money on eHealth is in everyone's best interest.

Influencing public behaviour takes a concerted and sustained effort. I propose that those of us who are interested in shaping public opinion with regard to the benefits of eHealth join together and develop a plan to do so. This plan will involve fund raising, marketing and public relations. Once we have developed this plan we can decide whether to create a separate organization or to work within an existing organization.

If you think that this idea is a good one (or, even if you think that it not so good), please contact me at mmartineau@branhamgroup.com and share your thoughts. If there is enough interest, I am prepared to organize some initial discussions. ●