



Last Words



Michael Martineau

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eHealth: A Patient's Testimonial

My parents love to travel and they are, in their early 70's, in good enough health to do so throughout the year. My wife Tracy (or, as Steve Huesing refers to her, my "Managing Editor") and I get along so well with my parents that we decided about this time last year that it would be great fun to take an overseas trip with them.

After months of planning we finalized our itinerary and at the end of October we embarked on a 2.5 week adventure across five European countries. Although I missed my daily television fix (I am a self-confessed television addict and found that an American sit-com with German voice-overs just isn't the same), the trip was fantastic and, as we hoped, we had a great deal of fun with my parents.

As I was thinking about a topic for this edition's column, I was determined to use our European trip as an opportunity to find examples in other industries of how standards promote interoperability and how interoperability facilitates commerce. I wanted to demonstrate by these examples that the concept of an interoperable electronic health record has analogs in other industries and that these analogs offer similar benefits to what can be achieved using electronic health records.

I didn't have to look very far to find some excellent examples of how conformance to a common standard not only facilitates commerce but also enhances the customer experience. Take train travel, for example. On more than one occasion we boarded a train in one country and disembarked in another country with no need to change trains in between.

Alas, the best laid plans are often derailed by unexpected events. Although I had planned to elaborate further on this and numerous other examples, I am compelled to share a recent incident from a business trip to New Zealand that occurred in the midst of writing this article.

I was in a taxi heading from the Auckland airport to my hotel downtown having just spent the day in Wellington meeting members of the New Zealand healthcare community including the Deputy Director for Health. To make conversation, the taxi driver, a jovial gentleman in his early 60's who introduced himself as "Don", asked me where I lived and what I did for a living. Having learned from past experience that terms such as eHealth or healthcare IT were often met with polite nods or sometimes even blank stares, I stated quite simply that I was a consultant who examined how computers were used to help deliver improved healthcare service. To my

complete surprise and utter delight he announced "Yes, they are".

I was momentarily stunned. I have spent more than 25 years of my life developing and selling IT solutions relevant to specific target audiences and I am used to polite nods but little real interest. As an eHealth industry analyst, I had yet to encounter anyone outside the industry taking much notice of IT in healthcare. Regaining my composure, I asked my new friend to elaborate on why he had responded so positively.

With great enthusiasm Don recalled his recent treatment for kidney stones, from initial diagnosis to treatment. As is increasingly the case in many healthcare systems, he had to visit several facilities in the course of his treatment and he described, without any prompting from me, how computers were used to view information about him at each of these facilities.

One example that Don cited was a visit to a specialist during which he was told that he needed to go for blood tests. He replied that he had just had blood drawn two days previous and suggested that perhaps the doctor should wait for the results of these tests. The doctor patiently explained that he had already seen the test results and additional tests were needed. Surprised at this response, he asked the doctor how he knew about the test results so quickly. The doctor swiveled the computer monitor around so that Don could see it and showed him the test results. Don said that he was absolutely amazed that his test results were readily available, "at the touch of button", to the specialist.

Don summed up his story by saying how delighted he was with his medical treatment and that he attributed this positive experience in part to the use of computers. Yes, you read that correctly. Without any encouragement on my part, he made the connection between the use of computers by the healthcare providers with whom he dealt and the quality of his care. He articulated with simple words and a warm, satisfied smile what many of you have been espousing for years: eHealth can have a positive impact on healthcare services delivery.

Have any of you heard of a story similar to Don's? Specifically, have you had anyone tell you that their diagnosis or treatment was positively impacted by the use of IT? If so, please email me at mmartineau@branhamgroup.com and I will find a way to make these testimonials widely available. ●