Volume 5 / Issue 1 / 2010 - Editorial

Letter from the Editor-in-Chief

Dear Readers,

On several occasions, we have pointed to the policy challenges facing Europe in terms of modernising its healthcare infrastructure and preparing for the era of real, meaningful e-health. There is, however, another associated problem here: how to process the explosion of data which will accompany this looming e-health revolution, and do so with the highest standards of security – on a round-the-clock, real-time basis, from a range of geographic locations.

One answer may lie in grid computing: largescale, distributed cluster computing involving hundreds or thousands of separate computers, coupled to network-distributed parallel processing. This is an area where Europe is taking a global lead. Two framework projects, BEinGRID (Business Experiments in Grid) and Enabling Grids for E-sciencE (EGEE), are rolling out ambitious ehealth applications. Our Cover Story provides some background to the new world of grid computing (whose conceptual roots are barely a decade old), and its implications for e-health.

While grid computing may form the skeleton and nervous system of the e-health infrastructure, at the other end there lies another major challenge: acquisition of healthcare data from patients, as far as possible, in their homes, on the move, and – like grid computing – on a round-the-clock basis, too. The field of sensors may be unknown to some, but it is the subject of a sweeping scale of technological change. A Polish expert assesses the multitude of challenges which lie ahead: the hard trade-offs between miniaturisation and usability, security and reliability, the promise of new materials, and last but not least, the need to lower costs and pave the way for mass market take-off in a virtuous cycle.

In between, however, lie a host of other ehealth opportunities. One of these is mobile Health or mHealth. In a special feature written for Healthcare IT Management, the co-founder of one of Europe's most exciting mHealth service providers, 3G Doctor, makes a strong case for the fact that workable mHealth solutions are already available. These range from matching organ donors with recipients through monitoring pregnant women to minimising patient waiting times. Most crucially, unlike many e-health projects – which face the risk of patient (and physician) resistance – mHealth can be pulled into life by enthusiastic patients and healthcare professionals, alike. All that is really required is a little nudge and push from healthcare IT/hospital managers.

E-Health looks at the future, but there is also considerable baggage from the past that is, also, of concern to healthcare IT managers. While finance for new medical technology is squeezing hospitals budgets across Europe, existing equipment is hardly being managed as efficiently as it could. The way forward: more attention to asset management systems, especially since they can be seamlessly coupled with mushrooming Wi-Fi networks. A healthcare consultant, and lead author of a major study into this subject, provides an analysis.

Demands for higher efficiency do not concern just devices, equipment and other things. People also count – but people management in the healthcare context poses its own specific challenges. An US health information specialist provides us with findings from a real-life exercise on how to enhance productivity, with a bottom-up team building process.

HITM proudly announces its 30th member organisation and we are sure that in 2010 even more will join our great community. We are also pleased to inform you that the registration for the world's most highly funded healthcare IT competition, *IT @ Newtorking Awards 2010*, organised in collaboration with the European Association of Hospital

Managers, is already open. We are looking forward to your great submissions!

Yours truly,

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Christian Marolt

Published on : Mon, 5 Apr 2010