

Technology for Doctors

online

HOME

ABOUT US

SUBSCRIBE

ADVERTISE

ARCHIVES

EVENTS

CONTACT US

Healthcare Technology

Commentary

EMR adoption – time for vendors to look in the mirror

By Sam Chebib



Ten years ago it would have been hard to imagine a world with tablet computers, smartphones, and widespread social networks. These technological achievements came from companies dedicated to innovation and the constant pursuit of building something better. But innovations in EMR systems are proceeding at a slower rate.

Apple Computers did not stop innovating after releasing its popular line of laptops and portable music players; the company pushed onwards and created the iPad. Nintendo did not give up development after watching Microsoft's Xbox surge in popularity; it came up with something different – the Wii, which has now revolutionized active gaming, and leading to further innovations like Kinect.

There's a lesson here, and it goes to the heart of why Canada remains so far behind when it comes to the adoption of EMRs. Compared to other industrialized nations, Canada ranks among the lowest for EMR adoption and use and yet, according to a recent report in Maclean's, we rank as one of the highest among developed countries for health care spending. Industries worldwide are fuelled by innovation and yet Canada's largest healthcare remains paper-based and increasingly expensive.

So what is it that's holding us back? What are the barriers preventing EMR adoption in Canada?

It starts with an unfortunate misconception that doctors are at least partly “to blame” for the slow adoption of EMR. This reasoning is flawed. Anyone will adopt efficiency tools and technologies if they find them intuitive – just ask all the people now on Facebook who spent most of their lives without a computer. As technology vendors, we have an obligation to constantly innovate, remove the adoption barriers and give physicians and healthcare provider the opportunity to use technology efficiently in a non-intrusive way.

The second barrier is cost. Provincial governments are currently subsidizing physicians to convert to EMR and, while this does create an incentive, it doesn’t provide a strong enough motivation for doctors to make the switch. Many physicians simply don’t see the value.

As an industry, we need to do better at educating physicians about the benefits of EMR and the return-on-investment for a clinic. It’s not enough that the government provides subsidies; physicians have to be convinced of the value proposition. An EMR vendor needs to offer a relatively low cost of implementation – for example, offering hosted, easy-to-manage solutions – while offering a high yield so that the benefits are self evident.

The third barrier to EMR adoption is the notion that it is too complex, and that physicians and their staff will have to become amateur IT managers in order to make it work. While all EMR software is a little different, the most effective solutions are those that make the lives of doctors easier, not harder. The goal of EMR adoption is to remove inefficiency, help doctors provide patients with better outcomes and peace of mind. Physicians should not have to use solutions that require a lot of their time and resources to make them work. The vendor is responsible for ensuring a safe and secure network and for providing the highest level of protection for a clinic’s patient files.

The findings in Maclean’s might be hard for the average Canadian to digest considering that our healthcare system is a source of national pride. When I look at our doctors and nurses, I see the smartest, most dedicated healthcare professionals in the world. But they are faced with the enormous challenge of using an old system to tackle new problems. That has to change.

Whether it’s video games or smartphones, consumers now expect to be surprised and delighted by the power of innovation. It’s high time that we did the same for our doctors.

Sam Chebib is the CEO of Nightingale Informatix, a National EMR software provider servicing Canadian and US physicians based in Markham, Ontario.

Posted April 28, 2011

[HOME](#) - [ABOUT US](#) - [SUBSCRIBE](#) - [ADVERTISE](#) - [ARCHIVES](#) - [EVENTS](#) - [CONTACT US](#)

