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Interview: Matt Anderson

In a conversation with *Canadian Healthcare Technology*, UHN CIO Matthew Anderson discusses the biggest IT and information management challenges for his hospitals, and care facilities across Canada. At the top of the list are patient flow and patient safety. **Page 20**

Relaxing MRI

Orillia Soldiers' Memorial Hospital has become the first in the country to install a full Ambient Experience MRI suite. The system reduces anxiety in patients, resulting in less need for sedatives and higher quality imaging. **Page 10**

Faster charting

A U.S. developer of Electronic Medical Records systems is marketing its technology in Canada. Said to use a non-template approach, it can reduce the time needed to chart a full patient encounter to as little as 40 seconds. **Page 32**

Telehealth in Thunder Bay

A high-speed telehealth network in Northern Ontario is saving patients



Web site will evaluate EMR systems available to docs

Too busy to assess Electronic Medical Record systems for themselves, many doctors don't know what to make of the claims of EMR vendors and simply avoid computerizing their practices. Now, Vancouver physician Dr. Alan Brookstone, left, in conjunction with doctors across Canada, will be rating EMRs, employing a five-star rating system, much like Consumer Reports. **SEE STORY ON PAGE 4.**

Web site to provide evaluations and ratings of Canada's EMR systems

BY JERRY ZEIDENBERG

With medical knowledge rapidly proliferating, and physicians of all stripes scrambling to keep abreast of the latest breakthroughs, how many doctors really have time to thoroughly investigate Electronic Medical Record systems?

Even when provincial authorities evaluate the systems and publish lists of provincially certified EMRs, the result can be more than a dozen 'approved' products. Who can spare the time to test-drive so many?

Don't despair, help may be at hand.

Vancouver family physician and EMR expert Dr. Alan Brookstone is launching a 'Consumer Reports' style service on his web site, CanadianEMR, that will offer ratings of the various systems used across the country. By design, said Dr. Brookstone, it will be easy to understand and to use.

Just like Consumer Reports and its five-star rating scheme for automobiles, CanadianEMR (www.canadianemr.ca) will rank electronic medical record products using the same sort of five-level scale.

The difference is that while the consumers' magazine and website employ expert reviewers, CanadianEMR will base its ratings on the assessments of Canadian physicians who have used the electronic charting systems. They'll draw upon their real-world experiences to inform others of the pros and cons of various EMRs.

The performance and quality of EMRs will be based on about 15 different variables in five high-level categories, commented Dr. Brookstone. These are: pur-

chase experience, implementation experience, support experience, usability and satisfaction with the product.

In addition, the site will aggregate information about a wide range of systems, creating a consolidated source of data. "Instead of jumping from one vendor site to another, we'll collect the information that physicians are looking for," said Dr. Brookstone. "It will all be available in one place."

The CanadianEMR site will allow doctors to compare a number of systems side-by-side according to a list of criteria, such as the provinces in which a solution is available, the number of users it is designed for, whether 24/7 technical support is available, the training that's offered, the ability to transfer data from one system to another, whether it is a local or hosted solution (or both), the standards that are employed, whether it offers interfaces to labs, X-ray clinics, pharmacies, and other functions.

Dr. Brookstone notes that not only will systems for GPs be listed and comparable, but solutions for specialists will also be included. "Specialists, like ophthalmologists, have different needs than family doctors," he commented. "It has been especially difficult for them to find aggregated sources of information."

Objective information about the systems and their capabilities will be supplied by the vendors themselves in a format that is easy to update and maintain. The categories will be established by a panel of clinical information system experts who are, for the most, part, practicing physicians.

"The result is that we'll be able to speed up the whole process of accessing the information that's needed to make a decision

about which EMR to acquire," said Dr. Brookstone. "We'll also be able to deliver a much better informed consumer to the funding bodies," he added, referring to the provincial groups that are subsidizing the acquisition of clinical information systems by Canadian physicians.

Developing the ratings and assessments for a range of EMRs will take at

comparisons of the Canadian situation with the U.S. and U.K., and more.

In addition to the thousands of monthly visitors to the site, there is a cadre of regular contributors to the CanadianEMR blog. It's this group that Dr. Brookstone is starting with. He intends to build up their ranks with new physician recruits from around the country.

Dr. Brookstone aims to launch a prototype of the new service in May. Start-up funding has been provided by Microsoft Canada and TELUS, both of which have major healthcare market strategies. Additional corporations will be invited to sponsor the service, but in order to maintain objectivity, EMR vendors won't be sponsors.

However, as an innovative way of earning revenue for CanadianEMR while adding value for vendors, the suppliers of clinical information systems will be able to add features to a vendor profile section of the site – such as podcasts, videos, testimonials and webcasts.

This will provide additional information for physicians who want it.

Not only will the site benefit physicians across the country by aggregating data and sharing the experiences of users. Vendors will also be able to use it as a source of market feedback, enabling them to address perceived shortcomings and improve their offerings.

According to Brookstone, "The strategy with CanadianEMR is to develop an objective and trusted resource that allows the sharing of knowledge and expertise and helps grow the entire EMR market for the benefit of physicians, vendors and funding organizations."



CanadianEMR web site design team, clockwise from left: Dr. Alan Brookstone; Thomas Stringham; Guy Steuart; Sabrina Wagner; Debbie Wager.

least six months, and Dr. Brookstone realizes that input from a large group of physicians will be required. "It doesn't serve anyone well to have an unrepresentative sample," he said.

As it happens, the project will benefit from a running start, since Dr. Brookstone has been operating the CanadianEMR site for the last three years. The site is one of the few in Canada with in-depth commentary by physicians about electronic health records and related issues – such as privacy and security, roadblocks to the adoption of computerized solutions in doctors' offices, why it's difficult to implement an EMR,