

There is insufficient evidence of the value of IT in the healthcare industry, according to a new global alliance, ACE, launched at HIMSS AsiaPac09, held on 24-27 February in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

ACE is a non-profit international group called Alliance for Clinical Excellence, formed to help healthcare organisations.

Speaking at HIMSS AsiaPac09, a regional healthcare IT conference, Oracle's Asia Pacific and Japan vice president, healthcare and life sciences, Dr Mehdi Khaled said there was a need to address the crucial problem of assessing the cost-and-benefit equation of IT in healthcare.

"In the airline and aviation industry, the number of accidents has been dramatically decreased," said Dr Khaled. "This has been due to that industry's ability to address issues, and agree to standards with metrics to prove the value of their standards and the value of the adopted technology.

"In addition, the car industry's use of crash desks to design safer vehicles should encourage a similar initiative in the healthcare industry. When it comes to the IT area: electronic health records (EHR) and clinical applications."

This is a multi-lateral global issue and concerns all stakeholders in the industry. Dr Khaled added: "IT should be treated like a drug clinical trial from lab through to market. Environment may be a factor and the IT environments and its values in different territories may be different.

"The Alliance for Clinical Excellence is an open, global collaboration focused on creating evaluation metrics of the cost and benefit (net value) of IT in healthcare with the aim to improve disease outcomes while reducing cost burdens. It aims to deliver evidence-based metrics, analysis and tools on a wide range of healthcare IT domains, in order to provide transparent and actionable recommendations to healthcare industry stakeholders."

ACE participants committed to the initiative at launch time were the Hong Kong Hospital Authority, Hong Kong Society of Medical Informatics, iSoft, MOH Holdings, National University of Singapore School of Computing, Oracle, Orion Health and CHIK Services.

All stakeholders must address this issue

"As a health informatics professional body, we constantly grapple with the lack of standardised and consistent standards when benchmarking healthcare IT systems," said Dr CP Wong, chairman of the Hong Kong Society of Medical Informatics. "An initiative like ACE is timely and urgent in bringing a global consensus on the cost and benefits of IT in healthcare. It has the potential to break the barriers to adopting healthcare IT effectively globally."

Said Dr Khaled: "We need clear metrics to improve disease outcomes and decrease cost burdens, thus include quality of healthcare as well as cost control in the equation. Through the worldwide alliance ACE, we are asking the question, and do not presume to have the answers. We are taking baby steps just now.

"ACE is looking forward to talking to the Malaysian governments, especially in view of its interest in a lifetime health record approach.

"The action frame should not just measure but find a way to enable healthcare organisations to embed these assessments in their daily practice. This is not driven by any one organisation. We hope many more organisations from all groups, such as government, IT, research, consulting and healthcare, will join us."