



Orion in 'the right place at the right time' for e-health growth

Karen Dearne | The Australian | January 25, 2011 12:00AM

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NEW Zealand software company Orion Health is the surprise linchpin of emerging e-health consortiums both globally and in Australia.

Orion is on an expansion drive, with its e-health records and information exchange products boosting revenue 80 per cent in the first half of 2010-11 compared with the previous year.

With 22 major projects in 12 countries, Orion believes prospects are finally looking up in Australia, with the federal government's new emphasis on e-health.

Late last year, Orion, with consortium leader Accenture and partners IBM, Oracle and Hewlett-Packard, bagged a \$146 million contract to deliver Singapore's national e-health records (NEHR) project.

Singapore's Ministry of Health says NEHR is a key part of its vision for "one Singaporean, one health record" for 5 million citizens. It builds on previous investments in integrated clinical management systems, a hospital records exchange hub and a GP IT program.

Orion Health chief executive Ian McCrae said the consortium successfully concluded a proof of concept demonstrating interoperability, scalability and acceptance by clinical users during the tender process.

"What we are doing in Singapore, in reality, is based on the products and experience we have been deploying around the world," Mr McCrae said.

"Our experiences in large-scale regional and national e-health records and health information exchanges across the US, Canada, Europe, the Middle East and Asia-Pacific mean we are able to offer tested strategies and solutions to the market, and that experience was critical in this win."

Mr McCrae said Orion was a "classic example of a company in the right place at the right time", as healthcare services struggle to cope with rising demand and costs, workforce shortages and greater public expectations.

Orion and its NZ-based secure messaging provider and primary care integrator HealthLink are well known in Australia from a range of high-profile state e-health pilots.

These include ACT Health's e-discharge summaries and e-referrals management system, NSW Health's lapsed Healthlinks e-records pilot, an e-prescribing project in Frankston, Victoria, and an integrated records trial for diabetes patients in Hobart.

But Orion's global spread has remained largely under the radar here.

Orion's Asia-Pacific communications manager, Amanda Ivanson, said the company had grown from five people in Auckland almost 20 years ago to more than 300 staff, as they prepare to open an office in Singapore.

She says the local market is a long way behind the rest of the world, but things are changing now. "The past 6 to 12 months have been huge for us in Australia; the introduction of healthcare identifiers and the government's new emphasis on e-health have started people thinking about what's needed," Ms Ivanson said.

"Patients are driving the move to electronic records as they expect to access their own data. And they want to control which providers and caregivers can access their records."

It is the emerging health IT partnerships that will take centre-stage as the federal and state governments decide on real-world implementations.

Orion's software includes its Concerto medical applications portal, which gives doctors a single point of access for patient records, lab results, digital images and service orders from any device with a web browser.

Behind that is the Rhapsody integration engine, a middleware product that pulls clinical data from wherever it resides, converts it into a standard format and stores it in Oracle's Healthcare Transaction Base.

Oracle's clinical data repository creates and maintains secure, individual patient records that can only be updated by authorised users, then provides an audit trail. It also ensures data formats comply with global healthcare semantic and clinical terminology standards so files can be easily and accurately exchanged between different clinical systems.

Then there's the problem of resolving identity problems, so that patient records are correctly matched across systems.

That's where IBM comes in, with its Initiate identity hub acquired along with the firm that developed it. Initiate software creates an enterprise master patient index, along with record locator services. It identifies and matches patient files against known data such as address, phone numbers, date of birth, known partners and common misspellings across vast databases.

HealthLink, of course, supplies the secure messaging services and late last year announced interoperability with HCN's GP desktop software, Medical Director, as part of the ACT e-referrals project.

ACT was an early adopter of Initiate's EMPI, but the territory also has an established base of iSoft products linking hospital, GP and community care facilities via its Viaduct health information exchange. The financially troubled health IT specialist won a \$2m contract with ACT Health for new patient and emergency software applications at Calvary Public Hospital in March last year, and completed rollouts of patient management systems in Victoria and Tasmania mid-year.

iSoft also installed systems worth \$7.8m at Sydney's landmark Macquarie University Hospital so the private facility could operate paper-free from day one. Meanwhile, US-based clinical, access and financial software provider Allscripts, another Orion partner, was selected as South Australia's "vendor of choice" for the state's 80-hospital EHR project.