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TOP STORIES

Health IT Firms See Growth In Connecting EHR Systems

Unique alliance boosts provider sharing of health records

SAN JOSE— **Certify Data Systems**, an emerging health IT firm in **Silicon Valley**, has formed a strategic partnership with **Cerner Inc.** for marketing a unique connectivity solution to seamlessly exchange real-time data between hospitals and physicians regardless of their computer systems.

The pact is considered a significant business leap for Certify, a small startup with fewer than 20 employees financed by \$8 million in venture capital. The agreement gives the San Jose company access to Cerner's extensive base of more than 8,000 hospital and physician facilities where its one-of-a-kind **HealthDock** appliance will be sold.

Marc Willard, the founder and CEO of Certify, says the partnership with **Kansas City, MO**-based Cerner was spawned during a meeting last August. In discussing technologies to provide two-way data flow between hospitals and physician computer systems "a light bulb went off," Willard says. "We were speaking the same language."

Willard says the timing is right for growing the business that remained stable during the current economic recession and even shows a slight profit. The company was doing research and development until 2007 when it went into a testing stage for the connectivity technology while waiting for the healthcare market to recognize the interoperability problem.

"We were ready to launch when the connectivity market finally started to mature," Willard says. "Luckily, it matured in our favor."

Robert Middleton, MD, a cardiologist with **Cardiovascular Consultants in Auburn, WA.**, says he chose Certify's technology last year to successfully link with the practice's electronic health record system to accelerate the daily processing of information. Before HealthDock was installed, nurses spent two days a week re-keying hospital lab results into the EHR database; that now occurs automatically, he says.

"Now they focus that time on patient care. The amount of time this has saved our physicians, nursing staff, and medical records team has been significant," Middleton says. "The electronic merging with our EMR has been effortless and continues to allow our staff to get results to patients in a timely manner."

Willard says the combined Certify/Cerner technologies make data sharing less of a hassle for hospitals and physicians by eliminating the need to develop interfaces between multiple physician practice EHRs and by improving the information flow through a real-time secure network. The technology also gives providers com-

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plete auditing and delivery guarantees and ensures clinical information goes into the appropriate patient charts, he says.

"Cerner and Certify share a common goal to help clinicians make informed decisions about patient care by providing them with the right information at the right time," Willard says.

Another advantage of the combined tools is removal of labor-intensive paper processing among hospitals, physicians, imaging centers, and other care settings. Radiology and lab tests can also be electronically relayed to hospitals from physician offices using the HealthDock appliance instead of the old method of paper requisitions.

Zane Burke, senior VP of Cerner, says Certify's HealthDock was identified as the best connectivity solution to enhance its own services to achieve true interoperability for information sharing across a care continuum regardless of the EHRs in use.

"Ease of connectivity is a vital missing ingredient to widespread physician acceptance of EHRs," says Burke, adding the integration of technologies allows the sharing of clinical information from patient tests, radiology reports, discharge summaries, and other clinical results that are easily transferred into physician practice EHRs.

Cerner, meanwhile, received FDA clearance Jan. 10 for its CareAware iBus solution to connect multiple medical devices and EHRs. The bi-directional solution provides true plug-and-play capabilities for connecting any medical device to any EHR system to gather and store such patient data as the status of heart rate, blood pressure, and other vital signs while monitoring device performance and utilization.

Willard says Cerner's push to expand business is rubbing off. He traveled 100,000 miles in 2009 to meet with industry thought leaders and promote the data connectivity tools in other areas of the country. He also hired five new employees recently and opened a sales office in Dallas.

He sees the niche business growing in 2010 assisted by the pending release of Health IT stimulus funds to providers for "meaningful use" of EHRs, which will boost the demand for efficient connectivity solutions. —*JOHN LEIGHTY*