
Volume 15 - Issue 2, 2015 - Technology Update

EHR Portal: The Gateway to Integrated Care

Interview with Joost Felix, Lead Product Manager, and Jörg Schwarz, Global Business Development Director, Agfa HealthCare
With the launch of its new electronic health record (EHR) Portal, Agfa HealthCare is taking customers on a journey towards an integrated care solution. Easy to implement, yet providing a comprehensive road map, the EHR Portal integrates the experience and knowledge Agfa HealthCare has acquired in its long history, to drive towards the future of healthcare delivery with an architecture that can be extended into the entire care continuum. Co-project leaders Joost Felix and Jörg Schwarz explain:

Can you explain what the EHR Portal is?

Joost: With the Portal, all care providers – physicians, nurses, physiotherapists, etc. – as well as the patients themselves can access health information, using an interface that is easy and clear to read and is focused on the patient. It provides an overview of information coming from different healthcare sources: hospitals, laboratories, imaging centers, etc. That is what it currently does. But there is an underlying Health Information Exchange (HIE) architecture that also allows the information to be aggregated on a higher level.

Jörg: It can pull and extract the information needed from different individual records and present it together in a very user-friendly way. So if you want the history of the patient's lipid panel, you don't have to sift through pages and pages of lab records: you get the most recent results of whatever you are looking for. And the patient or caregiver can see all of the patient's information in one place. But that is just the start. This is actually the first product in a new range called 'Agfa HealthCare 360'. This means that, while the EHR Portal provides excellent and important value now to healthcare providers, we have a planned evolutionary path that will in the future integrate all clinical players, including social services, pharmacies, etc. plus all imaging providers such as mammography and pathology.

Joost: That's why we call the EHR Portal the 'gateway to Integrated Care'.

What is the technology behind the EHR Portal?

Jörg: The EHR Portal is a web-enabled software platform that can be installed either at the customer's premises, or we can host it for the customer, with a service level agreement.

Joost: It can be integrated with both information systems like ORBIS* and HYDMEDIA** and with Enterprise Imaging. Combined with the XERO Viewer***, it provides high quality images. Radiologists want to see not only images but all kinds of information, such as lab results and patient diagnoses, which provides a greater context for the medical images. But it is up to the customer how and with what systems they want it to be integrated. That means it is scalable, too. It can be used with their current systems, and then be integrated with new products and solutions as they add them.

How is the EHR Portal answering the specific needs of hospitals and hospital groups?

Joost: Hospitals and hospital networks are asking us "How can we integrate with our referring physicians, how can we get results to them? How can we establish and strengthen our relationship with our patients? How can we keep onboard new patients more easily, for them and for us?" Hospitals don't want departmental systems, they want enterprise-wide solutions.

Jörg: Agfa HealthCare has a lot of great IT and Imaging products and solutions. With the EHR Portal, we are providing an umbrella that brings them all together, whatever solutions the customer has or needs. But it isn't a product that is intended to do just one thing: it has been designed to grow and evolve in order to continue the healthcare story.

Joost: And it's not just for Agfa HealthCare products! We are known as a company that makes products supporting standards, such as DICOM, IHE, etc. that allow other vendors to integrate their products with ours. That is true for the EHR Portal, too. A non-Agfa HealthCare picture archiving and communication system (PACS) can share images, a non-Agfa electronic medical record (EMR) can send results... So it fits into any hospital, regardless of what solutions they have.

Jörg: The EHR Portal also lets hospitals realize significant cost reductions, by making all information, including imaging, available where and when it is needed, and helping to eliminate redundant procedures. To take one example: if surgeons are preparing an intervention and cannot find an image that was taken three weeks ago, they might have to order another. We have studies that show that with the EHR Portal functionality, a hospital can reduce redundant images by up to 2% of the entire imaging volume. For a high-volume imaging environment, that is an enormous savings; in some cases enough to pay for the portal itself!

Why is Agfa HealthCare the right company to accompany the healthcare provider into an integrated care future?

Jörg: With the EHR Portal, we are taking proven Agfa HealthCare expertise and experience, and turning them in a new direction for our company: a direction that our customers, the healthcare providers, both want and need. Our IT solutions are already about sharing information in multiple hospitals, in a clinical, relevant way. In imaging, we have multiple regional projects that are also about sharing. Our clinical expertise is demonstrated by the over 1000 hospitals that use our EMR and over 2500 that work with our PACS systems. With our proven experience, we have a broader outlook, vision and capability – which is what you need for integrated care.

Joost: Soon the one hand it is a new product, but it is really built on all the different and proven elements and experiences Agfa HealthCare already has.

Can it be used on mobile devices, smartphones, etc.?

Joost: Absolutely! All functionalities of the EHR Portal are available on mobile devices, thanks to the native mobile interfaces for google Android and Apple iPhone mobile digital devices. The user experience is adapted to the mobile device, but the functionality is the same. So the screen is sized differently, but the pertinent information, such as lab results, is adapted to fit.

Jörg: Some smartphones have amazing image resolution these days, great for looking at high quality images. There is also an instant messaging system that is even better than email for a mobile environment, for sending short messages and collaborating with peers.

How will the EHR Portal help lead the way to integrated care?

Joost: The first step is the total overview of the patient care, not just of what comes from the care provider's own hospital or clinic, but all along the care continuum. This is what the EHR Portal will provide. The second step, still to come, will then be to include the activity-driven workflows.

Jörg: Then there is a third aspect: adding social care. Integrated care incorporates not only acute care, e.g., within the hospital, but also preventative and elective care. The caregiver's goal is to improve outcomes and prevent the patient from coming back to the hospital for the same problem, and to prevent severe escalations, like emergency room visits. So the patient's information needs to be available not just within the hospital but also to whoever will be involved in the patient's ongoing wellbeing. This could be a home nurse, a physiotherapist, even a relative who will be making sure the patient takes the prescribed medicine, makes it to the scheduled appointments, everything. That's our vision of the way forward, and with the EHR Portal we and the care providers have a road map to achieve it.

