

CANADIAN Healthcare Technology

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Telus purchases MyChart from Sunnybrook

BY ANDY SHAW

TORONTO – Telus, a Canadian telecommunications giant, is acquiring the MyChart personal health record system from its developer, Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, for a purported cost of approximately \$3 million. It's said to be the largest sum ever paid in Canada by a private company for software created by a public healthcare organization.

The acquisition, announced in January, is the first major move by Telus since it announced last fall that it would invest \$100 million in healthcare I.T. over the next three years. At that time, it signalled the importance of healthcare to the company with the creation of a new brand, Telus Health Solutions.

MyChart was developed over the past three years by Sunnybrook and is now used there by over 1,000 physicians and patients. It's an innovative, continuity-of-care electronic record system that can be used by patients, their families and their caregivers over the web to access, update and manage records.

On the Internet, they can do all that, no matter where they are in their acute-to-home-care regimen or where they might be in the world.

However, continuous in-house development of an electronic health record system would be difficult, even for a large organization like Sunnybrook – hence the alliance with Telus.

“I've always said that the kind of inte-

gration that MyChart helps bring about would need a public-private partnership to fully develop it. And now we have a model for it,” says Sam Marafioti, who guided the MyChart development team as Sunnybrook's vice president and CIO. “Part of that model is the strategic development relationship we've struck with Telus. So we will continue to help Telus develop the MyChart product and be identified with it.”

Telus appears to be a natural partner for Sunnybrook and its MyChart system, since the two organizations have been

doing business together for some time. Sunnybrook has been a long-time user of the Oacis electronic health record system, which was acquired by Telus when the telecom company purchased the system's developers, Emergis and Dinmar. While MyChart is aimed at patients, Oacis is the high-powered Electronic Health Record system that's used by clinicians and health professionals. Sunnybrook recently announced that it will be upgrading Oacis to a web-enabled version.

Also as part of their new strategic relationship, Telus has joined Sunnybrook in



Pictured (l to r), Sunnybrook's MyChart and eHealth team includes: Sarina Cheng, Sam Marafioti, Manty Leung and Kurt Rose.

PHOTO: DALE RODDICK

another development partnership with the Central Ontario LHIN, the most populous regional health authority in the province. Earlier, Sunnybrook had contributed MyChart to the LHIN and had begun guiding its LHIN-wide deployment. That should now be speeded by the brand awareness that Telus, the country's third largest telecommunications carrier, now adds to the effort.

"In healthcare, especially when it comes to a personal health record, the patient has to have trust in it. Faith in the brand, in other words. And, first of all, we think there is a lot of faith in the Sunnybrook brand," says Barry Rivelis, the vice-president of consumer health for Telus. "But when information is passing electronically from one to another, there has to be faith in the carrier of that information too. And that's where the Telus brand comes in."

One of the trust-building elements in Telus Health Solutions' favour, adds Rivelis, is the growing number of clinicians the division now has on staff and who advise and help with the development of their products and services. And they liked the capabilities of MyChart.

Through MyChart's web portal, patients can opt-in to set up their personal and family health records, manage a fair chunk of their own personal health information, then share that data with multiple care providers they choose.

On their own, they can see their test results, schedule appointments, find out what to do in an emergency, and link to educational information about their condition. As well, patients can also write a

diary about their health, build a contact list of their care team, watch instructive videos, maintain their medication history, and request prescription refills.

And that may just be the beginning.

"We've been in discussions with Microsoft HealthVault officials, who have come to visit us right from the top echelons in Redmond," Marafioti said during the interview for this story. "There are other IT giants out there, like Google, who are working on a comprehensive patient health record. But Microsoft thinks healthcare information is just too complex, and

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comes from too many sources, to be consolidated into a one-person health record.

"So what HealthVault does," continued Marafioti, "is simply to allow you to deposit all your healthcare information from any source, including the likes of MyChart, in a virtual yet secure vault. In our case, the Telus/Sunnybrook MyChart could well become a 'deposit' in Microsoft's HealthVault."

So impressed were his Washington state visitors from Bill Gates' former fiefdom, that Marafioti expects Microsoft to join the MyChart development partnership with Telus and the Central Ontario LHIN.

To ensure the success of that partnership, Marafioti says they will first focus on frequent flyers. Chronic disease sufferers

who have a constant need for their medical records will be the first to be offered MyChart. And the first among those firsts will be diabetics.

"MyChart is not really needed by all patients," Marafioti notes. "But anyone who uses the healthcare system frequently, and especially those who use it at more than one location in the continuum of acute to community and home care, will benefit greatly from having MyChart at their and their doctors' disposal. For them, it can be a God-send."

Marafioti also admits MyChart was not saluted quite that way, by clinicians at least, when first run up the masthead at Sunnybrook. But now it is.

"We can see very clearly here how our doctors at Sunnybrook have moved from being skeptics about IT, generally, to being enthusiastic adopters – especially when the cell phone is involved," says Marafioti. "When they find out they can access patient records through their cell phones, we start getting calls from them."

Marafioti adds, "They've gone from being skeptical to pushing us for new uses. I get calls regularly from physicians asking how they can apply MyChart to their department or discipline at the hospital."

This physician-led demand might well escalate by several notches once MyChart starts spreading throughout the LHIN.

Barry Rivelis says Telus Healthcare will roll out in phases. "First, we intend to make MyChart a success in Central Ontario. Then we can set our sights on the rest of Ontario, and from there on to the rest of the country. If all that works well, we might also look at international sales."