

Cloud Computing – Healthcare’s Silver Lining

Cloud Computing is set to transform data management and IT within the UK's National Health Service and healthcare in general predicts consultant physician Dr Cristoph Thuemmler.

[ClickPress, Tue May 18 2010] Cloud computing is the technology prescription that will help the UK’s National Health Service (NHS) beat the budget constraints imposed as a consequence of the credit crunch.

The internet based shared data and services resource will revolutionise the management of medical records and patient information while saving the NHS millions of pounds.

Dr. Christoph Thuemmler, a Consultant Physician with Chelsea & Westminster NHS Foundation Trust and Director of the Centre for Applied eHealth at Edinburgh Napier University says: “I see a trend where hospitals will not buy computer servers or software anymore but will instead buy services from the web.”

“The driver for this huge shift will be budget constraints. Hospitals will not have the financial means to replace their entire IT infrastructure every ten years to keep pace with the exponential changes that mean hardware and software become quickly outdated and obsolete.”

Cutbacks and savings were a major theme of the recent general election campaign but Dr Thuemmler points out there is limited scope for that in the NHS: “You can look at areas like IT because it is not one of the core functions of the NHS or hospitals in general. They are there to look after patients. Data management is a service which can be outsourced and bought considerably cheaper. “

He predicts we are heading towards a model where software and hardware will be consumed from a Cloud and will be bought on a pay-as-you-go basis.

Web-based Cloud Computing will also facilitate an integrated platform linking hospitals and healthcare centres across the country allowing secure access to shared information with patients’ records instantly available wherever they are needed.

Dr Thuemmler will compare the NHS IT revolution to those that have already swept the music, financial and retail sectors when he addresses the 5th annual Convergent Technologies Showcase at Stirling University Management Centre on Wednesday 19 May.

There is also a need for the wide scale introduction of Wireless, Bluetooth and 3G technologies to bring major improvements and efficiencies to patient care with real-time monitoring of patients’ conditions available to doctors via a smart phone and massive cost savings delivered through RFID stock control of drugs and equipment, says Dr. Thuemmler.

The advent of these new integrated technology platforms will do away with the need for large IT departments running servers to manage information. They will be replaced by system administrators looking after the machines and system security.

Dr Thuemmler will outline the major opportunities the introduction of these new technologies will offer for small innovative technology companies in his address to the Convergent Technologies Showcase.

He says: "SME's have to anticipate the arrival of these new technologies. They have to network, form partnerships and link up with big companies. The ideal scenario is for small companies and big industry to come together to develop the new system for the healthcare sector. That's how it should be and that's how it was done in the financial sector."

The (Labour) Government announced a scaling back the £12 billion NHS IT project but is supporting the development of a Cloud Computing platform in healthcare through the DACAR (Data Capture & Auto Identification) Reference Project which involves Edinburgh Napier University, Chelsea & Westminster NHS Foundation Trust, Imperial College London, GS1 and 2 SMEs (Kodit Ltd and CipherLab Ltd).

Edinburgh Napier University, represented by Dr Thuemmler and Professor William Buchanan on the project, is developing the Digital DNA security system for DACAR which has the potential to recognise people accessing data by the way they use a computer: typing speed, language, use of characters. Any deviation will, depending on the preset configuration, trigger a response which could mean that access to the system will be denied. Furthermore an additional feature will be the application of role and domain based security and the integration of the novel Internet Protocol Version 6 (IPv6).

He said: "The good news is there are things happening that will revolutionise IT within the NHS and health care industry."

Elaine Gemmell of Scottish Health Innovations Ltd, one of the main sponsors of the convergent Technologies Showcase, said: "The role of technology is crucial to delivering healthcare services that will meet the needs of patients in the 21st century and help everyone adopt a healthy lifestyle. This event not only provides the inspiration to establish innovative collaborations but offers practical advice on how to turn an idea into reality."

The half day event brings together healthcare professionals, clinicians, academics, inventors, investors and technology companies to hear keynote speakers outline the latest advances and future developments in healthcare.

Andy Taylor Director, Healthcare Policy, UK Market Affairs Dept. Association of British Healthcare Industries (ABHI) will deliver the opening address entitled "Innovative Healthcare Solutions for the Future."

Four break out sessions on the topics of fund raising, regulatory framework and two case studies highlighting how to bring a medical device to market will follow the keynote addresses.

Ends

Editors Notes

The Showcase event is supported by: EDTC (www.edtc.org.uk) NEXXUS (www.nexxusscotland.com), Scottish Health Innovations Ltd (www.shil.co.uk), Stirling University Innovation Park Ltd (www.suip.co.uk); Wellness & Health Innovation (www.wellnesshealthinnovation.org)

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