

Mobile Access to Critical Medical Records 'Coaleses'

BY C.J. WILKINS

Looking past the H1N1 virus that is dominating the health-care debate, one of the priorities of health boards in Canada is the development of electronic health-care records. With the opportunity to revolutionize health-care delivery, building an effective records system is certainly more complicated than Googling a patient's name. While governments and the public in general see it as a step toward more effective care, others are concerned about patient privacy.

One Calgary company is positioning itself to cut through the clutter to help improve the performance of electronic health-care records by putting access to them in the pockets of paramedics, doctors and others on the front lines of health-care delivery – securely of course.

Coalse Corporation, a technology startup founded in 2007, has developed a web-based software platform that makes information stored in electronic patient records accessible to health-care teams in the field and on the front lines of emergency medical care.

"There is a real need for collaboration in the delivery of health care among teams of health-care practitioners," says Coalse CEO Jacques Branch. "With the advancement of technology and the adoption of electronic records by family physicians, we are able to co-ordinate those records outside the physician's office and put them in the hands of health-care practitioners when they need them."

Historically, paramedics responding to a 911 call have had no access to a patient's medical records. With Coalse's technology, paramedics can securely access the patient's medical records with their iPhone and have a much clearer idea of the patient's needs.

A recent pilot project with the Oilfields General Hospital in Black Diamond illustrates the impact this type of technology. Coalse equipped the Foothills Regional Emergency Medical Services paramedics with iPhones featuring Coalse's technology, allowing them access to patient medical records from the hospital when responding to a 911 call.

In one instance, a call made by an elderly patient for breathing problems resulted in paramedics being able to determine the cause of the condition prior to arriving at the patient's home. Therefore, they were able to provide immediate care rather than spending additional time assessing the condition.

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From a patient-care perspective, the benefit is clear – more informed medical-care workers and improved care. From a health-care provider perspective, there is an improvement in both the efficiency and timeliness of emergency care, which has the potential to save those hard-to-get health-care dollars.

Of course, with more health-care providers being able to access one's records, there is concern over patient privacy.

"Security and privacy are paramount in any medical solution to be applied in real life. We use the same level of encryption that is used by banks and this has proven to be very safe," says Branch.

In addition to encryption, the Coalse system requires a login and password, as well as an electronic token that verifies the user when they access the system from a computer. Further, users are granted access to specific medical records based on their role in delivering patient care. For example, a home-care nurse would have different access than a paramedic.

Coalse is gearing up to increase its sales by adding staff and in December 2009 moved its offices to the Alastair Ross Technology Centre (ARTC). "The ARTC provides not only the physical resources we need, but also critical networking and financial opportunities as well," says Branch. "The ARTC facilities and the [Calgary Technologies Inc.] CTI network of people we have been fortunate enough to work with are truly exceptional."

Based on its customer successes to date, Coalse is currently negotiating a licensing agreement with one of Canada's largest electronic medical record companies, and is in the midst of concluding investment to allow a major expansion of licensing sales in Canada and the United States. If those networking and financial opportunities coalesce, you could soon see more paramedics, nurses and doctors in Alberta accessing critical medical records to help save patient lives.