

# Technology for Doctors

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Healthcare CANADIAN Technology

## Vendor spotlight

# EMR markets differ across Canada, says Wolf Medical CEO

*By Rosie Lombardi*



Many Canadian EMR vendors have broad national and even international strategies. Not so with Surrey-based Wolf Medical Systems, which has a narrow but deep focus on BC and Alberta's unique needs. "There isn't one Canadian market – it's a bunch of provincial markets, and things are done differently everywhere," explains Wolf's CEO Dr. Brendan Byrne (pictured). "Alberta alone has 17,000 medical forms and requisitions."

Billing systems, workers compensation, laboratory interfaces – these are just some of the entities that differ significantly across jurisdictions. Incentive programs around management of chronic diseases also vary greatly, says Byrne. "To capitalize on these programs, having an EMR is necessary but not sufficient. You need an EMR plus knowledge about making the EMR work to maximize the benefits."

Simply providing doctors with software tools isn't enough to tackle these complex issues, he says. "By analogy, it's like giving me a table saw. I can figure out how the tool works and how to turn it on or off, but I can't make a damned thing with it because I don't have a blueprint to create anything. Most Canadian EMRs are phenomenal tools, but we as vendors must go to the next level and help doctors create the blueprints they need to realize the full benefit of EMR."

International standards such as SNOMED-CT for standardizing medical terminology across systems will eventually create a more uniform environment in Canada. Byrne says Wolf Medical's EMR is already SNOMED-compliant, and its adoption by other EMR vendors is inevitable, as the standard is supported by Infoway. But even if every EMR vendor adopted it today, there would still be issues to tackle across the healthcare ecosystem, he says.

"Labs and other healthcare entities aren't using SNOMED-compatible codes, nor does SNOMED deal with the 17,000 forms in Alberta – and you can't have seamless interoperability without dealing with those forms and other local interfaces."

In recent years, both BC and Alberta have changed their requirements for qualified EMR vendors, mandating a switch to high-performance, hosted EMR systems.

“The market shifted, and we went from a company offering software that ran on local servers to complete solution provider providing 100 percent all-inclusive system, including software, hardware, WAN systems backed by a 5 year warranty with 99.9% uptime service level agreements. Now, our vision is to focus on outcomes instead of just installing software, working with doctors to figure out what benefits they’re gaining and how they could be using their EMRs better.”

As a practicing physician, Byrne says he has an insider’s view of the issues his customers grapple with every day. “I still practice for a half-day at our medical clinic every week, so I know exactly what our users experience in terms of speed and reliability. The challenge when you’re running a company is to see your product through your customer’s eyes – but every Monday, I start my week as a Wolf customer.”

He says Wolf is continuing to add new functionality to its systems this year. To boost physician productivity, Wolf offers Oracle’s Sun Ray Client with an integrated smart card that increases speed and mobility while also offering security. “It allows doctors to move around a clinic without having to login and out several times because their session follows them around. They can move to a new examination room, put their card into a computer, and they’re immediately in the system. If they need to leave for a moment, they can pull out the card and they’re instantly logged out,” he says, adding the cards can also be used for remote logins from home.

Byrne says Wolf will be boosting the card’s functionality with proximity detection in the next release of its EMR system this year. “The cards will be able to detect which patients doctors will be seeing next when they move from one examination room to another and will automatically pop their records up on-screen. It works by mapping patient records to the scheduling and room allocation system.”

Wolf is also releasing a new patient portal that will allow doctors to share information from records with their patients and communicate them in a secure manner. “Our portal is integrated with Healthspace, which is a personal healthcare record system that was recently launched by Telus and Microsoft in Canada, so information can flow into patient accounts that are set up there. The EMR 2.0 model is about moving to a hosted model, and the next EMR 3.0 is about extending the physician-patient relationship with technology.”

Wolf is also collaborating with third-party developers to add functionality to its systems. For example, the company is working with Clinicbook, a BC start-up working on the development of a Canada-wide online directory of medical clinics that computes and displays wait times in real-time to patients.

“Once you go to a software-as-a-service (SAAS) model, you also become a platform that other people can use to create interesting features. We have other partners that are looking to create unique functions that work with Wolf Medical’s EMR, so we can bring new features to our user base without necessarily rewriting our product,” says Byrne.

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