

Surrey company helping plug British Columbia doctors into the digital age

Wolf Medical Systems spearheading electronic conversion of paper-based medical records and health-care data

Krisendra Bisetty

Surrey's **Wolf Medical Systems** is leading a provincial charge into the relatively new but increasingly lucrative business of converting medical practices from paper charts to electronic medical records.

And with B.C.'s health ministry poised for a technological leap powered by \$150 million in national and provincial funding for e-health initiatives, including \$108 million for electronic health records systems, more technology players are expected to vie for a piece of the action.

In B.C. alone, nearly 90 per cent of physicians rely on a paper-based system of storing patient information and records, said Wolf president and founder **Dr. Brendan Byrne**.

That approach's shortcomings become abundantly evident, he said, when physicians have to wade through reams of records for specific information and collaborate with other physicians and specialists.

Wolf's Tablet PCs software includes physician-designed applications that automate billing, scheduling, referrals and laboratory results processing.

Byrne said it also helps doctors automate manual processes, reduce costs and increase productivity and efficiency.

It works the way physicians and medical personnel do, said Byrne, who quit his practice in 2001 to develop his software business.

Founded in 1998, the company now has more than 315 installed sites in Canada and more than 1,100 physician users nationwide, mainly in Western Canada. It has a 55 per cent market share in B.C.

After finishing medical school 15 years ago, Byrne and colleague **Dr. Michael Paletta** were acting as locums in various B.C. practices when the two realized how distant the medical profession was from the computer age.

Sitting with patient after patient, they found that it was often impossible to determine which medications a patient was on, let alone what their past medical history was.

"I was dismayed by all the paper and the illegible handwriting and thought there's got to be a better way than this to do what we do



RICHARD LAM

Wolf Medical Systems founder Brendan Byrne: "I was dismayed by all the paper and the illegible handwriting and thought there's got to be a better way"

with our information," he said.

"So we built the company."

That company is now a profitable \$2 million a year business, with revenue expected to jump between 40 and 60 per cent in 2006.

What was once an eight-employee company is now close to 35, with more hires expected to

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**– Dr. Bryce Kelpin,
medical director,
Continuum Medical Care**

increase Wolf's staff to 50 by year's end.

A major company challenge has been the cost of its system, which was around \$5,000 per physician for the first year and half that for subsequent years.

But Byrne believes that issue has been largely "neutralized" as the cost of computer systems has dropped.

And with government funding set to encourage physicians to make the switch to

electronic records, he said the conversion rate could be swift.

One of Wolf's biggest and most recent customers is the North Shore's largest medical practice, **Continuum Medical Care**, which was established in 2005.

Continuum is using the software on Tablet PCs to bring together more than 30 family physicians and specialists from various locations to deliver a higher level of care to 30,000 patients at its West Vancouver facility.

Continuum medical director **Dr. Bryce Kelpin** said that being able to track, monitor and manage patients' clinical information, as well as make better use of space, were among the benefits of the change, which, including hardware, cost approximately \$200,000.

"One of the fundamental principles that we embarked on was that we wanted to be a very high-tech facility.

As well we wanted to integrate information as seamlessly as we possibly could and the only way we could see to do that was really electronically," said Kelpin.

"You can't do that with charts. If someone takes the chart home, then you're lost.

Half the time you can't read the chart; half the time the information isn't in the chart." ♦

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