

stepping up their investments in a move to become digital hospitals. By 2010 the European Commission predicts that 5% of national health budgets will be invested in e-health systems and services.

IT role

Gerry Hurl, chairperson of the health informatics society of Ireland, believes that, despite the recent negativity surrounding healthcare and IT. the critical point for people to understand is the role ICT has in health care.

Hurl attached great importance to the HSE's transformation programme, which he said will look at the way the organisation does its business. "I think it will show how embedded ICT is in healthcare. I don't believe that concept is fully understood by the government i.e. - how critical technology infrastructure is to health care. It is one of the most information intensive industries there is and most equipment and devices, both clinical and therapeutic and so on, have an underlying ICT system architecture to support what they

Hurl said much emphasis is put on projects supporting financial and administration systems but what is more important is the technology that supports healthcare professional in doing their work on a day-today basis. "Most healthcare professionals could not function without ICT supporting them. And, if you look at the way ICT is developing, this will become more critical in the future. The development of smart drugs, artificial intelligence and so on are all going into and supporting

available.' **Standards**





capable of talking to each other on an architectural and information level. He cited the work of the Certification Commission for Healthcare Information Technology (CCHIT) in the US, which is developing the >>

nformation Communication Technology and healthcare at present are akin to oil and water – they do not appear to mix well. Of course, most of the health sector's ICT projects have ticked along nicely – though, of course, the highprofile failure of PPARS has lodged in the public memory. Even Joe Public will gladly tell you why and where that particular project went wrong.

Rude **health**

While the full promise of an ICT revolution in

healthcare is far from a reality, progress is being made, reports EAMON McGRANE

Looking just briefly at PPARs, it was not that the technology was at fault but, rather, that the automation of a process was not efficient or effective to begin with. This was, perhaps, the crux of the issue.

Also, PPARs was an administration system, whereas the main thrust of many ICT projects in the healthcare sector focus on the issue of treatment for the patient at the point of care, such as at the bedside.

Big budget

The current budget from the government to the health sector is some €14 billion; of that extremely large pool of cash, only a minute fraction is dedicated to IT. Indeed, some people within the



of information between these various stakeholders needs to be implemented. This will eventually lead to the ultimate goal, which is to link all the providers of health care with an electronic architecture which will enable any citizen's Electronic Health Record (EHR) to be available securely wherever the need arises, such as hospital, GP, at home, while travelling, and so on.

HSE suggest that the government does not have a feel for how IT can help in patient care.

With an aging population and an apparently creaking health system, IT is going to be essential in the fast turnaround of patients, the proper administration of drugs and care, and to

enable people to administer healthcare in their home.

healthcare can not only improve quality of care, but also help to manage, and even pull back, escalating costs. Datamonitor predicts that investment in healthcare IT will grow

Some people within the HSE feel that the government does not have a feel for how IT can help in patient care'

strongly over the next six years, with France. Germany and the UK combined, showing a compound annual growth

Patient Record

Hospitals across Europe are facing the need to cut costs, increase efficiency and become more accountable to the public. ICT can play a crucial role in driving safe and effective care focussed on the patient. Although overall the healthcare sector has a history of low capital outlay in ICT, hospitals throughout Europe are

Research company Datamonitor said ICT in

of 7.5%.

communications and integration

ICT IN HEALTHCARE 21

track peoples' illnesses, transmitting digital x-ray images between hospitals or inter departmentally. Information such as this needs to become instantly

Hurl said that, in an effort to purchase better technology and infrastructure, there were moves towards standards-based systems that will be fully integrated and

> HSE Report: I think it will show how embedded ICT is in healthcare. I don't believe that concept is fully understood by the government, Gerry Hurl, HISI

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Intel's MCA

A fter conducting studies that revealed many computer platforms did not meet the needs \square of doctors, nurses and clinicians, Intel developed a prototype device called the mobile clinical assistant (MCA). This is a mobile computing device that, at the moment, runs XP Tablet Edition. So far, Motion Computing and Philips have agreed to bring the MCA to market. It allows easy access to the healthcare records at the point of care, such as the bedside.

As well as practical features such as a carry-handle, the MCA has a built in RFID reader and bar code scanner. "Hospitals are starting to deploy solutions based on RFID and barcoding to identify patients at the bedside and ensure the right drugs are given to them," said Ivan Harrow, healthcare IT manager for Intel's digital health group.

The MRSA bug has also been considered when building the device. So it is sealed and can be disinfected by wipe-down.

"We conducted a number of studies on the MCA," said Harrow. "We worked with phlebotomists - who take blood samples - and we gave each of them an MCA device and we kitted out their trolleys with a Bluetooth enabled printer so that, when they were in a ward, they could look up the list of patients that needed samples taken, go to the bedside and instantly print a label and submit it to the lab. Information then didn't have to be manually entered onto a computer at the end of a shift.'

Motion Computing's product is on the market now, and Philips will have its model available later in the year.

Decades past

standards for assessing an information system. "If we follow that track and make sure the systems we acquire fit into theses standards then we'll be creating a better caring environment.'

Ultimately the vision of which Hurl speaks goes back to the HSE's transformation programme and the patient journey. Hurl said one of the main difficulties in the health service was being able to organise its processes and not expect the computer system to do it. "One of the things that happened in the past was we would buy a computer system and presumed it would change the way we work – well it doesn't."

"The issues for us in Ireland are not so much about implementing computer systems, we also must also get the system to work and if we don't have our processes organised and structured properly we can't expect IT to do that for us. The worst thing you can do is provide technology to support an inefficient way of doing things."

Steve Gillman, MD of Manitex, a supplier of IT products and services to the health market, said the situation in Ireland is very similar now to what is was 20 years ago: in other words. there was still much potential for ICT to bring real benefits to healthcare. He conceded, though, that the number of healthcare professionals regularly using computers as part of the treatment

Gillman believes using ICT to support clinical staff in their day to day work will bring greater benefits in improving patient care, better use of available resources, and providing

of patients was still very

By 2010 the European Commission predicts that 5% of national health budgets will be invested in e-health systems and services'



Tech usage: The number of healthcare professionals regularly using computers as part of the treatment of patients was still very low, Steve Gillman, Manitex

accurate information to manage the overall services. Gillman said the use of ICT in hospitals will

eventually lead to the creation of the Electronic Patient Record (EPR). This will contain a complete history of every patient's treatment in the hospital including tests, results, medical images, diagnosis, drugs and so on.

"Ireland was one of the first countries to start implementing on-line patient record systems, and several hospitals had these systems by the mid-1980, including the Meath Hospital. These patient administration systems (PAS) held little clinical information and looked after the basic administration of patients e.g. registration, admission, discharge, booking appointments, billing and so on. Some hospitals in Ireland did not even have this basic level of

computerisation until recently."

Despite this, some of the hospitals have been able to make progress towards the Electronic Patient Record and have shown what can be achieved. One of the most advanced hospitals in Ireland is Dublin's Mater Misericordiae. where patients' tests, results and medical images have been integrated and made available hospital wide. They have also provided

workflow support for many important clinical areas such as radiology, laboratory, gastroenterology and in the emergency department.

Other examples of advanced computerisation would be in Beaumont Hospital, Tallaght Hospital, Cork University Hospital. St. James's Hospital and St. Vincent's Hospital.

Near bed Barry Long of Zetes believes near bed care and the capture of data at the bedside is the area where

technology can provide advantage in the health sector. He said the aim, in the broadest sense, is to replace the clipboard at the end of the bed. This will mean that areas such as drug administration will become safer and more efficient. One of the areas that has been adopted by hospitals, and where trials have taken place, is using PDAs in the transfusion of blood. So when the sample is taken there's a chain of custody right down to the time when the nurse transfuses the blood. They scan the patient's wrist band, which has a barcode, and scan the blood bag. If they don't

match, then they don't go ahead with the transfusion.' Long said he firmly believed the Irish health service could be run more efficiently if it had a more

coordinated approach to

ICT. "There is now a bigger

requirement on hospitals to document their interactions with patients. That is not something that can be done effectively with

Ireland





Firewalls & VPNs

Radio way: Hospitals

are starting to deploy

solutions based on

RFID and barcoding

the bedside. Ivan

to identify patients at

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ICT IN HEALTHCARE 23



Paper over: There is now a bigger requirement on hospitals to document their interactions with natients. That is not something that can be done effectively with paper, Barry Long, Zetes

paper. It needs to be carried out electronically, and hospitals are struggling with that. Because often they know what needs to be done but usually find they're their not getting the budget or the buy-in from the management to do it."

Ministrations

One person we spoke with told *ComputerScope* that they often ask the doctors and other healthcare professionals what they would do if they became

Minister for Health. The most common answer was getting rid of the HSE or the Department of Health since neither was needed because they are two bodies doing the same thing.

Another point made was the necessity for buy-in. For ICT projects to be successful, the staff and unions have



to be fully behind it, otherwise IT initiatives could well fall flat.

Nonetheless, Gillman of Manitex remains positive, pointing out that the new ICT organisation within the HSE had inherited a few problems from the past. "As well as trying to deal with these, they have been making progress on at least building a platform for projects such as the Electronic Patient Record. There is still a lot to be done but we can have some optimism that – with the correct strategy, funding and partnership among the stakeholders real progress can be made in implementing ICT in healthcare.'

The aim is to *replace the* clip board at the end of the bed'

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