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Vendor spotlight

EMR safety and quality are at the heart of ABELSoft, company says

By Rosie Lombardi



Most EMR vendors focus on the features and functionality of their products in their business strategies. But Burlington-based ABELSoft Inc. says it goes beyond this commonplace objective to focus on something unique but very important from both the healthcare professional and patient perspective: software quality. “We also ensure that patient safety and provider liability issues are considered right at the planning stages in our systems,” says Arun Rele (pictured), president and CEO of ABELSoft.

Rele says software quality has been the company’s focus since its inception in 1977, so ABELSoft has a strong track record of producing solid systems. He says some EMR vendors are wiped out by liability issues when their systems go wrong, although the lawsuits are not always made public.

“Bugs can really affect the accuracy of what is being presented to the physicians on their screens. For example, when lab results are received, situations may arise, depending on how the results are transferred, where results are inaccurately presented. And there’s always a danger that if proper checks and balances are not in place, wrong medication can be administered to patients,” says Rele.

He cites a recent case that garnered media attention and concern about the safety of EMRs. In June, a premature baby in a Chicago hospital died after being administered 60 times the normal dosage of a drug. “Unfortunately, in this case, the EMR appears to have allowed serious alerts to be turned off and hence the error was not caught in time. There are 60,000 preventable deaths that occur annually in the US due to medication errors alone. A properly designed EMR can eliminate such errors.”

Rele says few EMR vendors have worked the right controls into their systems to catch these types of errors. “There’s a great danger if, say, a buggy software update goes out to a thousand physicians and many thousands of their patients’ lab results are not handled properly because of that. Worse still are buggy updates to ASP/SaaS systems, as these are instantly available. In Canada, quite admirably, all the provincial health ministries want to expedite EMR adoption. It is critically important to put equal emphasis on better quality assurance.”

ABELSoft has not had any patient safety or provider liability claims made against it since it started operating 34 years ago, despite the fact that a significant portion of its business is in the litigious United States, he adds. “We ensure that proper software quality management procedures are strictly followed in all phases of design and testing.”

ABEL software is used by over 10,000 health care providers and ABELMed EHR-EMR/PM is certified in the United States, and in Ontario. In addition, ABELMed has funding support in Ontario as well as in the USA.

Beyond software quality, ABELSoft offers all the features typically found in many EMRs: comprehensive clinical and practice management functionality, patient portals, mobile access for both providers and patients, and hosted ASP/SaaS solutions.

But the company is looking towards the future and already offers integrated functionality with a wide variety of medical devices, such as blood pressure monitors, ECG machines, probes and cameras. These devices can be made “smart” by adding electronic cards to them that can interface with computer systems and upload their data directly into them without human intervention.

“We can take that information directly into the database and manipulate, analyze and edit it, then present it to the doctors in a readable format. So doctors don’t have to look at a separate display or computer for findings from medical devices.”

Another unique feature of the company is that it successfully provides separate EMR products to both physicians and dentists, says Rele. This speaks to the company’s strong reach in the healthcare market. “We are the only company in North America that synergistically develops dental and medical software together under one roof.

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