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The More Things Change ...

A "paragon" of systems, an early HIMSS conference, and EMR predictions were all on the table two decades ago

by Vince Ciotti

The following observations are from the December 1988 issue of "Computers in Healthcare" — a precursor to HCI.



Featured Ad: A 2-page banner ad extolled the virtues of Systems Associates Inc. (SAI), whose Saint system was all the rage in the small, fewer than 100-bed hospital niche. The ad boasted about more than 300 hospitals having selected Saint, which offered a full range of financial and clinical systems on a turnkey minicomputer. SAI first offered its system on Point Four minis, which it re-labeled "Saint" hardware. So who cares about such ancient derelict pieces of hardware these days? Well, some of those old dinosaurs lasted for decades.

The eventual fate of Saint is even more relevant: SAI was acquired by American Express, which eventually sold it and several other acquisitions to HBOC. Just before McKesson acquired the company, HBOC announced a project to rewrite Saint in a true client/server platform, promising the result would be the "Paragon" of HIS systems. It took a little longer than expected, but today Paragon is indeed one of the only three-tiered client/server systems on the market, and finally selling as well as its predecessor.

HIMSS Conference: "Features More than 180 Speakers!" — One of the first annual HIMSS conferences was announced 20 years ago, in February, 1989 in Anaheim, Calif. The featured speaker was the late Sen. William Proxmire, known for his "Golden Fleece" awards. I wonder if he spoke about how SAIC scooped McAuto and TDS for the Trim-Mis contract!? This early HIMSS show featured 81 technical sessions, which is about how many next year's HIMSS will offer concurrently! Vendor exhibits included a demonstration of the new HL-7 standards, which promised to make interfaces a piece of cake (from a very large and stale cake, I'm sure). Another featured speaker was Helen Levine of Healthcare Management Counselors; HMC is long since gone, but has anyone heard of where Helen is these days? Happily retired, I hope. The registration fee then was \$595 for HIMSS members — so today's fees haven't gone up too much.

Feature Article: "Rumblings From the FDA"

A 2-page article warned that the Food and Drug Administration was setting its sights on LIS vendors. Seems the newly-discovered AIDS epidemic and other transfusion transmitted diseases were pushing the feds to regulate what once was a relative backwater of HIS systems: blood bank modules. To quote author Kirk Kirksey (currently the CIO of University of Texas Southwest in Dallas), "Recent blood banking literature and memoranda from the FDA point to a day when blood banking systems in particular, and LIS in general, will be required to be FDA registered as medical devices." Nah, say it ain't so! Why, next some federally

mandated committee will want to certify EMRs ...

Bedside Terminals — Perhaps the greatest quote from 20 years ago:

Editor Bill Childs wrote a piece on the new phenomenon of bedside terminals, this in an era when the typical CRT (cathode ray tube for you younger techies) was about 1-yd.-long and 2-ft.-wide, and a single one took up most of a nursing station desktop. Childs interviewed several pioneering nurses regarding these newfangled devices. The best quote of the piece was from Betty Fleck, an R.N. at Methodist Hospital: "The only problem we have now is the expectations we have for a total 'electronic medical record.' She said she expected to see one in her time and is anxious for the day when all records will be looked up by physicians and nurses at the bedside." So are we, Betty, so are we!!

Sidebar

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