



News Release

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World Health Imaging Alliance Poised to Bring Imaging Diagnostics and Data to the Developing World

Not-for-profit has a vision to help a billion people

Chicago, IL, April 6, 2009 -- The World Health Imaging Alliance (WHIA) announced that it has cemented key partnerships that will enable it to significantly ramp up its efforts to bring digital imaging technology to sites in need around the world. Basic diagnostic x-ray services are a key component of primary health care delivery. However, two-thirds of the world's population is without access to it, according to World Health Organization (WHO) estimates. The WHO further estimates that there is a need for one diagnostic imaging machine for every 50,000 people. WHIA's vision is to facilitate the deployment of 20,000 of these systems worldwide, thus providing one billion people with access to diagnostic imaging.

Access to imaging may be life-saving. As Mladen Poluta, Director of the Healthcare Technology Management Program at the University of Cape Town, explains, "HIV-positive patients are at increased risk of contracting (pulmonary) tuberculosis which can be diagnosed quickly with a chest x-ray. Even those on prophylactic TB treatment require chest X-rays. Given the large disease burden associated with TB and HIV in particular, cost-effective and sustainable imaging solutions at the primary level of healthcare - with teleradiology as an added value extension - will result in significant gains in the quality of care delivered, thanks to earlier diagnosis and commencement of treatment."

WHIA intends to fulfill its vision by providing a complete, low-cost, sustainable digital imaging solution. Although many of today's providers can bring low-cost solutions to developing countries, most have been ineffective at creating sustainability. As a result, less than half of the approximately 1,500 WHO-approved, installed X-ray systems are in operation today. In addition, many solutions miss capabilities such as clinical site needs assessment, image storage, teleradiology and remote monitoring; which WHIA can provide for enhanced sustainability of an imaging clinic.

WHIA is also working to significantly enhance the benefits of digital imaging by adding next generation functionality and services to its solution. It is concentrating on developing future capabilities that will make it possible for clinics and hospitals to access telemedicine for improved health service delivery; provide a platform that will be used to develop improved tools for computer aided detection and diagnosis; and provide clinics and hospitals with the ability to utilize electronic medical records and offer every patient direct access to their own personal health records.

In order to provide a complete solution, WHIA has developed partner relationships with key vendors. Sedecal, a global OEM manufacturer of x-ray systems, has partnered with WHIA to provide the WHO-approved x-ray machine. "Sedecal is honored and excited to be able to join this project," says Manuel Martinez-Garcia, President and CEO. "WHIA will make a difference in diagnosis and thus improve healthcare in developing and remote areas of the world. Sedecal's commitment is to assist WHIA on the technical side, putting its engineering resources at the disposal of the project and developing the x-ray systems for these special applications. Sedecal has also invested in WHIA by donating equipment and manufacturing equipment at a discounted cost."

Digital medical imaging is provided through a relationship with Carestream Health, a global company providing medical and dental imaging systems and information technology solutions. Several of Carestream Health's Point of Care CR systems have been donated for use in the pilot installations. "We welcome the opportunity to support WHIA's ongoing efforts to find sustainable solutions to the unique challenges facing the delivery of healthcare in developing countries," said Diana Nole, President, Digital Medical Solutions, Carestream Health. "Medical imaging systems play an important role in the diagnosis and treatment of injuries and disease. The availability of even just a few high-quality imaging systems can help improve the health of thousands of people in impoverished regions of the world."

The software systems which manage the digital images have been provided through a partnership with Merge Healthcare, a leading medical imaging software solutions company. Merge has pledged staff time, software licensing and product development assistance for the current and next generation of WHIA solutions. Merge is currently working to develop a new generation of its world renowned MergeBox™ to encapsulate a site's total image management requirements in one rugged box. "Sustainable digital imaging solutions require solid, intuitive image management," says Justin Dearborn, CEO. "Merge Healthcare has been delighted to provide this to WHIA, as well as to work together on the broader vision of diagnosis and data anywhere in the world."

Another key facet to WHIA's ability to provide a sustainable solution is its partnerships within the academic community. "By establishing close ties to the local universities in the communities with WHIA sites, we've significantly increased the odds of a successful implementation and the sustainability of these clinics. Local universities serve as an anchor for WHIA's efforts and an ongoing resource for the clinics," explains Matt Glucksberg, Professor and Chair of Biomedical Engineering, McCormick School of Engineering, Northwestern University, and a WHIA Board member.

WHIA currently has a site established in South Africa and another under implementation in Guatemala. Close relationships with the Rotary International and local organizations have provided WHIA with a lineup of candidate sites interested in receiving its solution.

In addition, WHIA has established relationships with many of the global NGOs involved in providing imaging services.

“WHIA has a great model for delivering leading edge diagnostic tools to developing markets,” says Ivy Walker, WHIA’s CEO, “but that is just the beginning. Our efforts in data compilation can create a platform that can be used to develop improved tools for computer assisted diagnosis and public health data analysis. Ongoing partner and solution development under this model will continue to move WHIA toward this vision.”

About WHIA: WHIA is a non-profit, diagnostic medical imaging solutions provider that leverages vendor, NGO and academic relationships to deliver low cost, diagnostic tools to underserved communities worldwide. WHIA provides reliable and sustainable solutions giving communities access to the latest technology for better patient care. More information on WHIA can be found at www.whia2009.org.