

# Optum Targets Doctors with Progress-Based Pathology Management Solution

Australian healthcare information solutions company, Optum, has followed a successful pilot of its Optum PathLink application in Western Australia by rolling out the system to over 14,000 doctors around Australia.

A Progress-based application developed by a three-way partnership involving Optum, software development company IQ Health, and Progress Software, PathLink provides end-to-end management of all pathology transactions to improve efficiency and security, reduce costs and eliminate errors.

All three companies believe the market for this kind of product is enormous. Australian doctors request millions of pathology transactions every year, with Medicare alone recording over 19 million patient episodes in 1999-2000, not including private pathology services.

Not only does PathLink provide doctors and their pathology suppliers with a secure and efficient mode of communications, but it also reduces reliance on expensive couriers, automates previously manual processes and provides a complete audit trail that protects both health providers and patients.

PathLink was piloted by the Perth-based Innaloo Medical Centre and its pathology laboratory, ePath WA. Both companies were delighted with the outcome of the trial, praising the pathology management system for its accuracy and time-saving features.

Dianne Ward, the Practice Manager at Innaloo said the PathLink system was fantastic the daily task of deciphering requests is all but eliminated, while ePaths Gerry Mabarrack called PathLink a major breakthrough for patient services for our referring doctors.

Executive Director of Optum PathLink, Rob King, said PathLink provides a secure and error-free way of managing every step of the pathology service.

In the past, doctors would hand-write pathology requests and then courier them to laboratories where they sometimes were misinterpreted or lost, he said. Instead, PathLink automates and manages the entire process, from the initial request and transportation of samples, tracking specimens through the testing process and then the delivery of results back to the doctor.

Because PathLink has been fully integrated into the leading practice management systems doctors are already using, they don't have to learn a new application but simply access our functionality as an additional benefit of the system they know and trust, said Mr King.

The current Australia-wide roll-out revolves around the integration of PathLink with the industry-leading Medical Director clinical software, which boasts a user base of over 14,000 doctors Australia-wide.

We've signed letters of intent with Health Communications Network, which developed Medical Director, as well as with TripleG Asia Pacific Pty Ltd, which supplies the dominant ULTRA laboratory software management software, to integrate PathLink into their applications. This will ensure that all ULTRA and Medical Director clients have access to our software, Mr King said.

We didn't want to align ourselves with any specific vendor, but are working with all the major suppliers of clinical practice and laboratory management systems to integrate PathLink with their applications.

Although Optum identified the opportunity for a system like PathLink and created the vision, the actual development work has been handled by IQ Health and Progress as their contribution to the partnership.

IQ Health's Business Development Manager, Andre van Biljon, said Progress was the obvious choice for the development platform because of the particular strengths of its middleware technology which allowed Internet based communications to be managed within the application logic.

Progress Open Application Server and Proxy Generator are very powerful and give us the ability to confidently deploy distributed application modules

and application logic within diverse systems while guaranteeing a high degree of stability and performance, he said.

We can implement distributed business logic on disparate systems which means the system operates equally well on a low-end PC as it does on more powerfully-configured computers. System maintenance is minimal because the Progress application servers make it easy for us to develop in a modular fashion, resulting in re-usable code.

Progress gave us a way of developing a product that was scalable, standards-based and able to support open connectivity, and which offered write-once, run-anywhere capabilities, which really enabled us to move forward quickly. We also enjoy the advantage of mainstream technology at very low cost maintenance and Progress is certainly an industry leader in this regard. This will maximise our returns from a project that required huge investment, said Mr van Biljon.

PathLink is a highly complex system that required an in-depth understanding of a range of technical issues and platforms. We're working with very new technology and have used the Progress tools in a highly advanced way.

Since the computing environment in most medical practices is often less than optimal, we needed a reliable way of interfacing with them and Web-based integration with their existing software offered the simplest option for the users, he said.

Under the model developed by Optum, IQ and Progress, doctors receive the PathLink software as part of their regular software upgrade and the pathology laboratories pay a set fee for each pathology transaction requested through the system.

The ASP-style approach means the application is centrally hosted but a certain amount of application logic also resides on the users desktop to enable them to use the system while offline.

This user pays model makes it a very cost-effective enhancement for everyone concerned, with no expense for the doctors and only minimal cost incurred by the pathology laboratories each time the system is used. However, the savings achieved as a result of using PathLink more than outweigh the costs so it's a win-win situation for all concerned, said Mr van Biljon.

Under the terms of the partnership between Progress, Optum and IQ Health, all companies contribute to the cost of developing and marketing PathLink with a commitment to share all profits.

We're working on a business case that involves a two year return on investment, but the fact that we all have a stake in any outcome means everyone involved is very motivated to make this work, said Mr King.

PathLink is only the first in a series of health-related technology systems we are developing in Progress under the Optum brand, with the next one due for release being a referrals management system to improve communications between GPs and their referring specialists, he said.

ENDS