The Story of OSCAR

Working Together for Freedom, Choice and Health

Once upon a time, Dr. David Chan, a family doctor at McMaster, created EMR software that he called "OSCAR". Then in 2001, he and McMaster gave it to the world for free.

Over time, many family doctors learned about OSCAR, tried it and really liked it. They liked it so much they told others about it, shared ideas and helped each other learn how to best use it. Several of these doctors also liked programming, and they worked with McMaster to make OSCAR even better. Now OSCAR was not just an EMR, but more importantly it was a community of family doctors working together to improve health and patient care using an EMR. In 2007, this community formed an organization called the "OSCAR Canada Users Society" (OCUS).

Soon there were family doctors who wanted to use OSCAR but didn't want to set-up and run the EMR themselves. By that time, a few companies had discovered OSCAR and decided to offer to install and maintain the free software for physicians, the physicians having to pay only for the service and support. These companies came to be known as OSCAR Service Providers or OSPs.

Several years passed, and OSCAR kept improving as McMaster worked together with the growing community of OSCAR users that reached beyond Canada and expanded to include specialists, community services and other professionals. More OSPs became involved too, helping to spread the word about OSCAR and building successful businesses supporting OSCAR users.

During this time, the province of Ontario decided it was important to encourage all family doctors to use an EMR, but not just any EMR. In order to be on the list for doctors to choose, OSCAR had to be certified, meaning McMaster had to prove that OSCAR could do everything that the province, through OntarioMD, said an EMR had to do. OSCAR passed each round of certification, McMaster's efforts making it possible for physicians choosing OSCAR in Ontario to receive money to support them in changing their practice to use an EMR effectively.

Then in 2010, OntarioMD issued new certification requirements which included specifically that before the EMR would be considered for recertification, the "Vendor" had to be ISO-certified. Some people said there was no way an open-source community could become ISO-certified, so there would be no way for OSCAR to be recertified in Ontario. McMaster, OSPs and OSCAR users believed it was possible, and set out to prove it.

- The first decision made was that, whatever had to be done or changed to get certified, OSCAR had to remain open-source and freely available to all.
- The second decision made was that McMaster would be the lead (the "Vendor") on behalf of OSCAR users, and would work closely with a network of interested OSPs and OSCAR users to get and keep the required certifications. This decision was really important because it meant everyone was on the same team, using the same product and improving it for the good of all. The alternative would have been to have individual OSPs take the open-source code and get certified individually. This would have split OSCAR into many disconnected parts and forever changed the ability of OSCAR users to work with and share with each other across the full community.
- The third decision was that OSCAR users who benefitted from the certifications would share the cost of getting and keeping those certifications. All agreed McMaster should no longer have to cover the costs of certifications that benefit all OSCAR users and create more business opportunities for OSPs. In order to cover these costs, it was decided physicians using OSCAR and receiving funding from OntarioMD would contribute a "Certification Fee" of $25/month, and all other OSCAR users were invited to give voluntarily.
- The fourth decision was that each OSCAR user would be responsible for her/his choice to use OSCAR and for anything that may happen as a result, and would agree to protect McMaster from risk. This made it possible for McMaster to agree to take the lead and do what was needed for OSCAR users to have freedom, choice and robust and certified OSCAR software, and to strengthen how everyone worked together as One Team for One OSCAR.

These were big decisions, and sometimes hard to make, but after lots of conversation and planning and work together, McMaster was confirmed as ISO 13485:2003 certified in 2011. Then in 2012, OSCAR was recertified by OntarioMD, and was confirmed as Canada Health Infoway (J Class) certified for the first time. The OSCAR community had achieved what some thought wasn't possible! With this achievement, McMaster created a not-for-profit organization, "OSCAR EMR", to take over responsibility for the ISO-certified quality program and managing the OSCAR code on behalf of the OSCAR community. OSCAR EMR is now the not-for-profit "Vendor" for the certified OSCAR software, stewarding the contributions of OSCAR users and OSPs for the good of OSCAR, and for freedom, choice and health.

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The Next Chapter – New OSCAR: A new look and feel for the functionality OSCAR users love!

We welcome all to continue this journey with us for One Cause. One Team. One OSCAR.