

## **Second phase of IT system at Mater Dei to be launched soon**

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The laboratory and radiology systems provided by ACS Healthcare Solutions are gradually infiltrating their way into all the departments at Mater Dei Hospital, enabling real-time, accurate access to diagnostic information and improving the way in which healthcare is delivered to the people of Malta. The systems complete the first phase of the Maltese government's Integrated Health Information System (IHIS), after the original 2006 tender was cancelled because of bribery allegations. The contract was subsequently split into two parts, with the first \$20.9 million segment being awarded to American firm Affiliated Computer Services, Inc., who in turn subcontracted the laboratory work to iSoft, the shortlisted bidder for the original tender. The radiology and picture archiving was entrusted to General Electric.

"I was in Malta last week and met the two parliamentary secretaries at the Health Ministry and there was a very strong sense of confidence about the first phase," ACS senior vice-president Arvind Kumar told The Times Business.

"We are all confident that things are on the right track."

Mr Kumar said he had been informed that the documents for the second phase of the tender were being put together and should be released soon, although he was not yet aware of the timeline for completion. ACS has already made it clear that it would be interested in the second phase.

"We would like to see ourselves as a partner when the rest of the system are brought in that involve clinical functionality like the pharmacy, the emergency department and in-patient care," Mr Kumar said last year.

It is too early to say whether ACS would bid as part of a consortium, he said this week from the US during a telephone interview. He said that the level of integration reached once the second phase is completed would place Mater Dei among the leaders in terms of automation.

"There are approximately 6,000 hospitals in the US but only about 20 per cent of them have achieved this degree of automation," he said.

"Mater Dei will soon be on par technologically with the best hospitals in the world, including the best the US and Europe have to offer." Project manager Mel Frizzell said that phase one was already proving its worth.

"We now have electronic images available that may be accessed by healthcare professionals not only from any device within the walls of Mater Dei but, with the right credentials, from remote locations as well. All the images are now also available from common archives, so you get the patient's history.

"All of this makes diagnosis easier, which makes health care delivery much more efficient. The images are available straight away and their quality is excellent, meaning that there is less room for error or uncertainty in difficult cases. Additionally, the systems are scalable, meaning that they will be able to accommodate the needs of the government as it addresses future healthcare services and improvements," he said.

ACS Healthcare Solutions have a seven-year contract to ensure the smooth running of the system and is operating a command centre from within Mater Dei, manned by five staff. "We are very satisfied with the implementation. We encountered one or two glitches post-implementation that we would categorise as 'severity one' but these were resolved relatively quickly and within the timeframe established by our service level agreement. There was nothing atypical. We are very satisfied," Mr Kumar said.