A New Face for IMIA News

As part of the wider support that the IMIA Board has tasked me with providing to Steven Huesing, IMIA’s Executive Director, I have taken over responsibility for the collation of materials for the IMIA News pages and the Calendar of Events. Steven has been responsible for producing these in the last few years, and while he will be a hard act to follow, given his long standing editorial and publishing expertise, I hope that I can build on the model of content that he has started. The aim is that these IMIA News pages will provide not only news about IMIA for its members and the wider health and biomedical informatics global community, but also provide material from that wider community that will be of interest to the members of the IMIA ‘family’. The intent is also to be synergistic with the IMIA website, and I encourage you to visit the website frequently, as it is developed further, and add news items, conferences and meetings, through the online forms.

MedInfo 2010 – Call for Submissions and New Mentor Scheme

The beautiful city of Cape Town, South Africa will host the first African MedInfo. The 13th World Congress on Medical and Health Informatics, to be held on September 13–16, 2010 will again provide opportunities for the global health and biomedical informatics community to come together in stunning surroundings. It will also provide a specific opportunity for the South African and wider African health informatics community to interact with their colleagues from further afield, and explore the major challenges facing Africa.

The theme for Medinfo 2010 is Partnerships for effective e-Health solutions, with a particular focus on how innovative collaborations can promote sustainable solutions to health challenges. While information and communication technologies have enormous potential for improving the health and lives of individuals, innovative and effective change using such technologies is reliant upon people working together in partnerships, so as to create effective solutions to problems with particular regard to contextual and environmental factors. The event promises to boost exposure to grassroots healthcare delivery and the underpinning health information systems, and in addition to facilitating renewal of existing partnerships, will open the door to new academic partnerships into the future and help to nurture a new breed of health informaticians.

Medinfo Scientific Mentor Scheme

An important innovation for MedInfo 2010 is the “Medinfo Scientific Mentor Scheme”, which aims to provide additional support to early career researchers or non-native English speakers. This scheme allows submission of papers for early review by a member of an international panel of health informatics experts who will provide feedback prior to the final MedInfo submission date. Participants in the scheme will then have an opportunity to revise their paper in light of the feedback, prior to final submission. To participate in this scheme, initial submission of papers is by July 1, 2009; revised papers then proceed through the normal scientific review process.

MedInfo Committees

Professor Enrico Coiera, IMIA Vice President MedInfo, is pleased to announce that the leadership team for MedInfo 2010 has been selected. As previously announced, Dr. Ricardo Bellazzi (Università di Pavia, Italy) and Professor Johanna Westbrook (University of Sydney, Australia) will respectively chair and co-chair the Scientific Programme Committee (SPC). They will be assisted by a committee that brings together a wealth of expertise, reflecting global diversity, the breadth of our field, and that contains both established informaticians and ‘new blood’. Dr. Charles Safran (Harvard Medical School, USA) will be assisted in his role as Chair of the Editorial (Proceedings) Committee by Heimar Marin (Brasil) and Shane Reti (New Zealand). Full details of these committees, and the members of the Scientific Mentor Scheme Panel of Experts, are available on the MedInfo 2010 website.

Invitation to Participate in MedInfo 2010

Details of how to submit papers, as well as other types of submission, including posters, panels, workshops and tutorials, which embrace the conference theme and which relate to one of the conference topic areas, are available on the MedInfo2010 website at http://www.medinfo2010.org/abstract. For full information on the Invitation to Participate, and other aspects of the event, are on the conference website http://www.medinfo2010.org

Be sure to mark these important dates on your calendar:

- September 30, 2009 – Deadline for MedInfo 2010 paper submissions
- September 13–16, 2010 – “Booked for MedInfo 2010 – Cape Town, South Africa”
HELINA 2009 Meeting in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire

The Sixth Health Informatics in Africa conference – HELINA 2009 – will take place in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire on April 16–18, 2009 at the Versus Bank Conference Room-Plateau. With the theme Information and communications technology in health information systems of African countries, the event aims to provide an international platform for interaction and collaboration between health professionals and health informatics specialists for the promotion and development of the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the health and bioscience domain. In particular, the conference aims to promote dissemination of information about health informatics applications in Africa, evaluation of the use of ICT in health, capacity building and the introduction of ICT in the training of health personnel. It will also feature discussions on the introduction of modern technologies in healthcare delivery and provision, and seeks to foster and encourage collaboration and networking between African experts in health informatics.

Organisation of the event is being lead by Société Ivoirienne de Biosciences et d’Informatique Médicale/Ivorian Society of Biosciences and Health Informatics (SIBIM/ISBHI), the Ivorian National Member Society of IMIA. Full information on the event is on the HELINA 2009 website at http://sibim.net/helina/en/index.html

Morris Collen: what’s up, doc?

IMIA’s good friend and Past President, Marion Ball, has highlighted two recent items, from the LA Times and MedPage Today, with regard to one of IMIA’s most respected Honorary Fellows, Dr. Morris (Morrie) Collen. As the LA Times piece notes, Morris Collen, 95, who earned his medical degree before penicillin had been used to successfully treat anyone, and is a pioneer in health informatics, is now working on his sixth book, and is actively studying the ways that prescription drugs could interact and harm the elderly. But, it notes, he is especially proud of his driving licence, which records his date of birth, 11–12–13 (in the 20th Century) and the expiration date, 11–12–13 (in the 21st) – probably the only one of its kind in the country.

The complete article, a fascinating exploration of the life and times of one of our field’s pioneers, can be viewed at: http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-olddoc3–2009jan03,0,1984385.story. In addition, the MedPage Today story, which features Morrie’s active engagement in studying the impact of possible adverse reactions to polypharmacy for millions of older Americans based in his personal experience, and long-standing interests. The piece also features a video clip of Morrie, at http://www.medpagetoday.com/infectiousDisease/PublicHealth/12170.

AMIA Leading International Project to Develop Health Informatics Building Blocks

The American Medical Informatics Association (AMIA) is spearheading a project that aims to strengthen the global e-Health workforce through a sustainable infrastructure for informatics training in low resource settings. The Welcome Trust hosted an initial planning meeting in London, UK on December 9 to 11, 2008 that brought together 20 stakeholder representatives and thought leaders from AMIA, IMIA, and other organizations. During the meeting, participants provided input on a framework for international distance learning in biomedical and health informatics. Their deliberations emphasized the need for both high quality content on core informatics concepts and flexibility in how content can be delivered so that the training meets local needs.

This initiative builds on AMIA’s successful experience in distance learning in the United States (i.e., the 10 x 10 program) and has been made possible by a 12-month planning grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. It also builds on discussion of the “20/20 Bits & Bytes” concept (now termed Health Informatics Building Blocks – HIBBs) in the context of the July 2008 Bellagio meeting on building e-health workforce capacity and addressing “Global South” learner needs in the area of biomedical and health informatics (see http://www.ehealth-connection.org/).

AMIA will deliver a plan for its international distance learning program in biomedical and health informatics to the Rockefeller Foundation in spring 2009.
IMIA Education Event

The Department of Medical Informatics at Hospital Italiano de Buenos Aires (HIBA) in Argentina hosted the 2008 IMIA Working Group on Health and Medical Informatics Education meeting. Entitled Building Worldwide Capacity for the Health Informatics Workforce, the meeting brought together about 70 participants on October 27–28, 2008.

The goals of the meeting were to provide both an exposition for identifying and harmonizing competencies and curricula for health and biomedical informatics as well as provide a working meeting for ongoing work of the IMIA Working Group on Health and Medical Informatics Education. As a result of the meeting, work is also ongoing on finalising the revisions to the IMIA Recommendations on Education in Biomedical and Health Informatics; this is being lead by Prof. John Mantas, vice chair of the Working Group. The conference agenda with links to papers and/or slides can be accessed at http://www.hospitalitaliano.org.ar/imiawged/.

IMIA Review of MedInfo Frequency

The IMIA Medinfo Biennial Cycle Taskforce, set up following the decision of the May 2008 IMIA General Assembly to approve, in principle, changing from having a MedInfo every three years to having one every two years, has been working to explore the practical implications of the change for IMIA, and other organisations. The Taskforce met in Pilar, Argentina in October 2008, and will meet again in Dublin, Ireland in conjunction with the IMIA Board meetings in April 2009, in addition to planning for other meetings and discussions at events during 2009. The Taskforce members have also been engaged in electronic discussions of the issues and implications. A report on the issues will be presented to the 2009 IMIA General Assembly meeting in Hiroshima, Japan in November. Several organisations, including EFMI and APAMI, have already explored the implications for the frequency of their own meetings, and are working with IMIA to ensure a harmonious solution that is beneficial to all organisations and to the global community.

USA to Invest Billions in EHR Adoption, Health IT

These are exciting times for biomedical and health informatics in the United States. President Obama has just signed into law the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. This is the federal economic stimulus package, which has provisions to fund investments in health information technology (HIT).

The Act will invest $19 billion in EHR adoption, delivered mostly via incentives through the Medicare and Medicaid system of $44,000–64,000 per physician and up to $111 million per hospital for meaningful EHR adoption. Another $2 billion is invested in the Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT under the able leadership of Dr. Robert Kolodner. This money will be devoted to specific projects that promote adoption and other activities required to attain it, such as further development of standards, health information exchange, and certification of systems. There is also language, though no specific dollar amount, for efforts to promote development of the HIT workforce.

The bill also has language, though no specific dollar amount, for efforts to promote development of the HIT workforce. It even specifically calls out for education and training in informatics. This will hopefully provide the opportunity to describe the critical role of informatics expertise in successfully implementing HIT that results in improved quality and safety of health care while reducing its costs.
Web 2.0, Health and Informatics

While many people and organisations have differing views as to what "Web 2.0" actually is, there is growing interest and activity in its possible implications for the future of health, and of healthcare information, and the ways in which patients, informal carers and health professionals interact. The IMIA Web 2.0 Exploratory Taskforce, established by the 2007 IMIA General Assembly meeting in Brisbane, Australia, and currently lead by Dr. Lincoln de Assis Moura Jr. (Brasil; IMIA Treasurer) and Dr. Chris Paton (University of Auckland, New Zealand), continues its exploration of possible implications, especially for IMIA. The Taskforce is developing a new web portal for its activities at http://www.imiaweb2taskforce.org/ (courtesy of Chris Paton and his colleagues). Many of its members actively contributed to the successful Medicine 2.0 conference held in Toronto, Canada in September 2008, and as a result of this event, several new, young enthusiasts were recruited to the Taskforce. We hope to actively contribute to the second Medicine 2.0 event (Medicine 2.0'09 – http://www.medicine20congress.com), planned for September 17–18, 2009 and again to be held in Toronto, Canada.

IMIA Board and General Assembly Meetings 2009

The IMIA Board will meet in Dublin, Ireland for two days of discussions on April 24–25, 2009. The purpose of a two-day meeting, rather than the traditional one-day meeting, is to provide time for the IMIA Board to examine in detail the implications of the IMIA Strategic Plan, and further develop actions within the IMIA Transition Plan, as to ensure IMIA’s successful growth. The IMIA Medinfo Biennial Cycle Taskforce will meet as part of these wider discussions. The meetings are being hosted by the Healthcare Informatics Society of Ireland (Cumann Riomheolais Slainte – http://www.hisi.ie), who will also be organising a special one-day scientific seminar, with the theme “Modern Healthcare ICT: Challenges and Opportunities” on April 23.

The IMIA Board and General Assembly will meet at the International Conference Center, Peace Memorial Park, Hiroshima, Japan in November 2009 as part of the Collaborative Meetings on Health Informatics week, CoMHI in Hiroshima 2009 (http://home.hiroshima-u.ac.jp/~humind1/comhi2009/). In addition to the IMIA Board meeting (November 24, 2009) and the IMIA General Assembly meeting (November 25, 2009), a host of other events will take place. The APAMI 2009 (Asia Pacific Association for Medical Informatics 2009) meeting, with the theme “What are medical records for?” will take place on November 22–24, 2009; the 29th JCMI (Joint Conference on Medical Informatics) occurs on November 22–25, 2009, with the theme “Trailblazer as the keystone of global health informatics with optimum contributions in security, quality and satisfaction to the World”; and the IMIA Working Group on Security in Health Information Systems (SiHIS) will meet on November 21–24, 2009 for a conference titled “Trustworthiness of health information ... Issues in security and system management for patient safety”. It promises to be a packed and exciting week, and an ideal opportunity to interact with health informatics colleagues from around the world.

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