South America on the Move

It’s spring time in Buenos Aires at the end of October – the beginnings of a new season of growth when the seeds planted in the fall begin to blossom – it’s a time of rejuvenation, energy, vitality, re-awakening – a time of promise for the future.

It’s also symbolic of the key phrase that accompanies the implementation of IMIA’s Strategic Plan – “Let a thousand flowers bloom” – “Que se abran cien flores”.

Those flowers will be in full bloom from October 27 to November 1, 2008 in Buenos Aires, Argentina and its environs. That time will see the culmination of the hopes and aspirations of many.

October 27 and 28

The Department of Medical Informatics at Hospital Italiano de Buenos Aires will host “Building Worldwide Capacity for the Health Informatics Workforce” sponsored by the IMIA Working Group on Health and Medical Informatics Education under the leadership of Dr. William Hersh, the Working Group’s Chair. This international event is a key component of the work inspired by the Rockefeller Foundation’s commitment to the development of an eHealth agenda for the global south. The two-day session is a true example of collaboration in its finest sense – on a global scale. It is a noteworthy achievement surmounting a host of language, cultural, economic, religious and political “barriers” and is a reflection of IMIA President, Reinhold Haux’s vision of the ideal world as he articulated so vividly in his first message to the IMIA family.

October 28 – October 31: InfoLAC 2008

InfoLAC 2008 is the result of herculean organizing efforts on the part of diverse constituent organizations; AAIM, the Argentine Association of Medical Informatics, IMIA LAC, IMIA’s Latin American and Caribbean region and IMIA. The venue, hosted by the Biomedical Sciences Faculty of the Universidad Austral – Pilar, is in Pilar, Argentina located a short distance from the city of Buenos Aires. The congress embraces:

- 2nd Medical Informatics Argentinean Congress
- 3rd Latin American Medical Informatics Congress
- 2nd Argentinean Symposium on Nursing Informatics
- 2nd Medical Informatics Argentinean Congress
- 3rd Latin American Medical Informatics Congress
- 2nd Argentinean Symposium on Nursing Informatics

This was achieved through the collaborative effort of groups from all over Latin America – Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, Brazil, Mexico, Cuba etc. as well as Spain and other supporters from the IMIA Board, international agencies and industry.

Much credit is due to the congress’ Honorary President, Valerio Yácuobsohn, an Honorary Fellow of IMIA who has relentlessly pursued a vision of securing a rightful place in the medical informatics community for the Latin American countries and to Dr. Juan Carlos Di Lucca, the President of the recently (2007) re-formed Argentine Association of Medical Informatics for his courage and innovation.

IMIA invested funding in Latin America several years ago to nurture and stimulate the reinvigoration of the region – sowing the seeds, so to speak. Those seeds, under the custodianship of IMIALAC vice president to IMIA Lincoln Moura (Brazil) sprouted – and, under the care of the current vice president, Dr. Alvaro Margolis (Uruguay), they have come to full bloom. The growth is real: Venezuela has officially joined the IMIA family as a national member and the DuocUC School of Health in Santiago, Chile, has joined IMIA’s Academic members’ community. Where a few lead, many will follow.

This conference will:
- improve knowledge and skills of the participants on using and managing information technologies and their relationship with the healthcare domain;
- promote the exchange of information between the participants emphasizing the integration of regional contact networks;
- demonstrate and discuss topics related to the development, application and evaluation of IT in healthcare;
- provide an ample portfolio of presentations detailing the work, progress, and challenges in the development of healthcare information systems, both in theoretical and applied fields; and
- present the methodologies of application, investigation and outcomes of informatics in the healthcare domain.

The congress is supplemented by a face-to-face meeting of the Latin American national informatics leaders to determine the course of action that will guide the region on its journey of sustainability in the face of many economic challenges. A key focus is to harness the energy created by this premier event to endure and grow stronger as the future evolves.

IMIA board members will also take advantage of this unique environment to participate as academics, researchers and scientists and, as custodians of IMIA’s future, conduct the business of the Board. Several IMIA committees and task forces will hold their meetings there; a demonstration of their wholehearted support.

The future has always been the consequence of motivation, need, and investment – not of funding (though it helps a lot) but of time, dedication and the committed spirit of individuals who value ideals. In a pioneering environment it can be done in isolation, but at the current state of the art (or science) and complexity of the informatics domain in health, we need to hang our egos on the door as we enter and work together – using the unique skills that we have as individuals collaboratively and cohesively to achieve the broader objective of a healthier world for all.

“Let a thousand flowers bloom” – to create a garden that’s sustainable you need a visionary for the design, an architect to articulate the vision, an engineer, builder, and artisans to create the hardscape (walls, paths, irrigation). Agriculturalists to assess the soil, climatic conditions and solar exposure, horticulturalists to determine suitably floral species, landscapers to plant the flowers, bulbs, shrubs, tubers and seeds, and gardeners to provide the day to day care. They all need to work in harmony – sounds complicated … AND it’s just a garden!

That analogous example brings us back to the beginning – we face a very complicated challenge.
Can we meet that challenge?
● IMIA’s leaders think so – IMIA’s President has a highly personal commitment to it.
● The achievements of the InfoLAC congress, even before it starts, is sound evidence that we have the necessary collective energy and “will” to start the process.
● The international organizations and the media are advocating it.

MedInfo 2010 – Full Steam Ahead!

Cape Town, South Africa will be the home for the first African MedInfo in 2010. The World Congress will again bring the global health informatics community together in stunning surroundings to address the major themes in e-health and health informatics and provide first hand opportunity to learn about emerging research developments from around the world. MedInfo will also provide a specific opportunity for the South African and wider African health informatics community to come together around the major challenges facing Africa, and engage with the global community.

Professor Enrico Coiera, IMIA Vice President MedInfos, is pleased to announce that the leadership team for MedInfo 2010 has been selected.

The Scientific Program Committee (SPC)

Riccardo Bellazzi, PhD (Chair), Associate Professor, Dipartimento di Informatica e Sistemistica, Università di Pavia, Pavia, Italy
Professor Johanna Westbrook, PhD (Co-Chair), Director Health Informatics Research and Evaluation Unit, Faculty of Health Sciences, the University of Sydney, Lidcombe, Australia

Editorial (Proceedings) Committee

Charles Safran, MD (Chair), Associate Clinical Professor, Harvard Medical School, Newton, MA, USA

The full membership of these committees is expected to be announced shortly.

Professor Denis Protti Awarded Honorary Doctorate

Professor Denis Protti, a pioneer of health informatics in Canada and founder of the country’s first School of Health Informatics at the University of Victoria, British Columbia, will be honored with an Honorary Doctor of Science from City University London, England, where he served as Visiting Professor and Chair Health Informatics for several years.

The honor is in recognition of Professor Protti’s key role in providing guidance and assessments of England’s Information for Health national strategy. He is well known for the “Protti scores” that were introduced into their LIS process as a result of one of his reports for the National Health Service Executive: “An Assessment of the State of Readiness and A Suggested Approach to Evaluating Information for Health”.

The ceremony will be on May 14, 2009 in the Guild Hall in London.

Former NHS Chief, Richard Granger Joins KPMG in Australia

At a special dinner sponsored by KPMG at the Health-e-Nations conference in Melbourne, Australia, in early September, the firm announced that Richard Granger, former Chief Executive, NHS Connecting for Health and former Director General, National Health Service IT, England, has joined KPMG’s Global Health Practice as a Partner. The practice is based in Australia.

As previously announced, the Organizing Committee is led by Lyn Hamner, MSc, (Chair), Division Manager: Health Informatics R&D Coordination, eHealth Research and Innovation Platform, Medical Research Council, Tygerberg, Western Cape, South Africa.

Her team has been working hard over the past year to ensure that MedInfo 2010 is a huge success. Keep up to date as to current developments by visiting http://www.medinfo2010.org/

The first collaborative joint meeting of the committees will be held in conjunction with the InfoLAC 2008 Conference (http://www.infolac2008.com.ar/) in Pilar, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Further information will be available on IMIA’s website (www.IMIA.org).

Be sure to mark your calendar – September 10-13, 2010 – “Booked for MedInfo 2010 – Cape Town, South Africa”

Denis is also well known within the IMIA family, serving as the Chair of the IMIA Education Working Group for many years. The School of Health Information Science was one of the first Academic Members of IMIA.

The IMIA family extends their hearty congratulation not only for this latest achievement but also for his pioneering effort over the past 30 years and for the inspiration he has instilled in his students to guide them on the path of adopting health informatics as their profession of choice.

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Edward H. Shortliffe Appointed AMIA’s Incoming President and CEO

AMIA’s Board of Directors has announced the appointment of Edward H. Shortliffe, MD, PhD, MACP, FACMI, as its incoming President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO). He will assume the role full-time in July 2009.

Shortliffe succeeds Don E. Detmer, MD, MA, who has led AMIA since 2004. Dr. Detmer helped develop a fundamental transformation of AMIA to become the professional home for biomedical and health informatics by significantly enhancing AMIA’s initiatives and programs, improving operational efficiency and quality, expanding its national and global presence, and solidifying the strength and relevance of the AMIA brand.

Dr. Shortliffe comes to AMIA from the University of Arizona, where he is Professor of Basic Medical Sciences, Professor of Medicine, and (at Arizona State University) Professor of Biomedical Informatics. Founding dean of the Phoenix campus of the University of Arizona’s College of Medicine, he stepped down from his dean’s role to return to the faculty in May 2008. Until March 2007 he was the Rolf A. Scholdager Professor and Chair of the Department of Biomedical Informatics at Columbia College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York City and was previously Professor of Medicine and of Computer Science at Stanford University (1979-2000).

AMIA Chairman, David W. Bates, MD, MSc, successfully led the executive search and succession planning for a new CEO, which was conducted by a sub-committee of the Board and AMIA’s Executive Vice President, Karen Greenwood. “Over the past year we have made significant progress in the execution of a leadership succession strategy”, said Bates. “With a strong commitment to providing service to our community, outstanding financial performance, and turning the organizational reins from one great leader to another, AMIA is well-positioned for the future.”

Dr. Shortliffe is a well-known member of the IMIA family. Among his many contributions to IMIA, he served as the Chair of the MedInfo 2004 Organizing Committee. The Congress, held in 2004 in San Francisco, USA was one of the most innovative and successful in IMIA’s history. In recognition of his contributions to IMIA and the global medical informatics community, Ted was inducted as an Honorary Fellow of IMIA, a distinction that has been granted to only 20 individuals in IMIA’s 40-year history.

For further information visit www.amia.org.

Courtesy: Tia Abner, Communications Manager, American Medical Informatics Association (AMIA)

Education Collaboration in South Africa

For the past two years, members of CHIRAD, the Centre for Health Informatics Research and Development, have been teaching an MSc in Health Informatics in Mthatha, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. A collaborative venture, funded by the Medical Research Council of South Africa, has support and input from the Eastern Cape Health Department, and is taught at Walter Sisulu University (WSU) in Mthatha, using the curriculum developed by and taught at the University of Winchester in the UK. The students will receive their degrees from the University of Winchester.

A cohort of 11 students started the course in June 2006 and are due to complete in November 2008; the cohort includes faculty members of the Department of Family Medicine at WSU, local hospital managers and staff at the Nelson Mandela Academic Hospital, and senior information staff at the Eastern Cape Department of Health.

The project is designed to help build local health informatics capacity and competence by providing a group of qualified health informaticians who will then work locally to develop a centre of excellence for health informatics for the Eastern Cape and South Africa, developing the MSc in health informatics locally, as well as other academic and vocational courses to meet locally-identified needs for information management skills.

CHIRAD members Professor Graham Wright, Dr. Peter Murray, Mr. John Bryant and Dr. Helen Betts have been most closely involved in teaching and administering the course. The students recently presented a panel, based in their course work, at the HIS2008 conference in Durban, and have participated in the EFMI Special Topic conference recently held in London.

In related initiatives, several prominent South African health informatics colleagues and CHIRAD have set up a not-for-profit offshoot in South Africa to facilitate further development.

Further information can be found at http://www.chirad.org and at http://www.wsu.ac.za/news/informatics.htm

Courtesy: Dr. Peter Murray, IMIA VP Strategic Planning Implementation

Contact address for IMIA:
Steven A. Huesing
Executive Director IMIA
5782 – 172 Street NW
Edmonton, AB T6M 1B4
Canada
Tel.: +1 780 489 4531
Fax: +1 780 489 3290
E-mail: imia@shaw.ca
http://www.imia.org