Towards Health for All: WHO and IMIA Intensify Collaboration

Joint Communiqué during Medinfo 2007 in Brisbane

A. Geissbuhler¹, R. Haux¹, S. Y. Kwankam²
¹International Medical Informatics Association
²World Health Organization

Summary

Objective: To intensify the collaboration between WHO, the World Health Organization, and IMIA, the International Medical Informatics Association.

Methods: Identifying key areas of collaboration and publishing a joint communiqué during Medinfo 2007 in Brisbane, Australia.

Results and Conclusions: WHO and IMIA have identified three key areas of joint work for the next three years: the Global Observatory for eHealth, the use of ICT for the development of the health and health care workforce, and sharing eHealth products and services related to intellectual property for development.

Keywords
World Health Organization, WHO, International Medical Informatics Association, IMIA, health informatics, medical informatics, health for all

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WHO and IMIA Intensify Collaboration

Information and communication technology (ICT) as a whole, and the Internet in particular, have ushered in an era of profound opportunity and potential for worldwide advancement in public health and clinical care [1, 2]. ICT has significant potential to contribute to achieving the health Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations [3].

IMIA, the International Medical Informatics Association [4], has been a non-governmental organization (NGO) in official relations with the World Health Organization, WHO [5], for a number of years. The WHO eHealth Resolution [6, 7], passed in 2005 by the World Health Assembly, coincided with IMIA’s initiation of a comprehensive strategic planning process to create a strategic alignment of IMIA’s goals with the needs of its stakeholders and in turn to create a framework of the IMIA agenda for the future [8, 9]. WHO has identified eight priority eHealth action areas, endorsed by its Executive Board in January 2006. These are: access to health information; eHealth norms and standards; legal and ethical issues; an observatory for eHealth; public-private partnerships for ICT research and development for health; ICT for health promotion; ICT for supporting human resources for health; and ICT for service delivery.

IMIA’s knowledge can be supportive to, and perhaps even crucial for WHO’s work in initiatives such as

- the Global Observatory for eHealth: to provide WHO member states with strategic information and guidance on the
application of ICT for health through a WHO-coordinated country-based network ([10]);

- the use of ICT for the development of the health workforce: Human resources for health (HRH) are increasingly recognized as crucial element in improving health systems and attending the Millenium Development Goals. WHO’s ICT for HRH initiative explores the use of eLearning and other ICT-mediated techniques in initial education and training, as well as for continuing professional development and support of health workers in developing countries [11];

- sharing eHealth products and services related to intellectual property for development (SHIPD): Health systems are strengthened and health is improved in low and middle-income countries by providing access to appropriate products and services protected by eHealth Intellectual Property Rights, through WHO [12].

Recognizing the strategic dimension of this relationship, WHO and IMIA decided to intensify their collaboration. During Medinfo 2007, IMIA’s 12th World Congress on health and medical informatics, one invited keynote address, one panel session and various meetings took place on intensifying the collaboration between WHO and IMIA. These events had been prepared during the year before Medinfo 2007 and enabled attendees to learn about these initiatives and to contribute actively to their development. In addition, the role of IMIA Liaison Officer to WHO had been elevated to a board position, giving it more visibility and a better access to high-level discussions within IMIA. Finally, during Medinfo 2007 a joint communiqué was prepared and presented at the conference’s closing ceremony.

Communiqué of The World Health Organization (WHO) and The International Medical Informatics Association (IMIA) presented at Medinfo 2007, the 12th World Congress on Health and Medical Informatics, Brisbane, August 22 and 24, 2007

The WHO eHealth strategy, developed in 2005, consists of five strategic directions, namely: strengthening health systems in countries; fostering public-private partnerships in ICT research and development for health; supporting capacity building for eHealth application in Member States; development and use of norms and standards; and promoting better understanding of ICT in health through investigating, documenting and analyzing the diffusion into, and impact of, eHealth in countries. The strategy led to World Health Assembly resolution WHA58.28 in July 2005, known as the WHO eHealth resolution.

IMIA is the leading international organization in health and biomedical informatics for stimulating and communicating high quality research, education and application in a new and one world, with medical informatics now being one of the central disciplines for achieving health for the people in all of our societies, through its field’s contributions to high-quality, efficient health care and to high-quality research in biomedicine and in the health and computer sciences.

IMIA traditionally has close ties with WHO as a Non Government Organization (NGO). It is currently the only professional body in the eHealth space with this privileged link to WHO.

In order to intensify the collaboration between the two organizations, WHO and IMIA announces during Medinfo 2007 that they have decided to further strengthen its cooperation. In particular, we have identified three key areas of joint work for the next three years:

- the Global Observatory for eHealth,
- the use of ICT for the development of the health workforce, and
- sharing products and services related to intellectual property.

IMIA will continue and intensify to support WHO in its efforts on health for all by providing advice, information resources and guidance in a variety joint projects that will be set up within the next months. Both organizations agreed to summarize outcomes of their efforts during IMIA’s next World Congress, Medinfo 2010, which will take place in September 2010 in Cape Town, South Africa.

Dr. S. Yunkap Kwankam, Coordinator eHealth, World Health Organization
Dr. Antoine Geissbuhler, IMIA Liaison Officer to WHO
Dr. Reinhold Haux, IMIA President for 2007 to 2010


WHO as well as IMIA consist of its members. We encourage all of you, working in the field of health informatics/medical informatics to contribute to this important task towards health for all. Your knowledge is needed.

References

The WHO-IMIA Communiqué at Medinfo 2007

With this editorial we want to publish this communiqué in one of IMIA’s official journals, in order to document and further communicate this milestone.
Correspondence to:
Prof. Dr. Antoine Geissbuhler
IMIA Liaison Officer to WHO
Geneva University Hospitals
Division of Medical Informatics
24, rue Micheli-Du-Crest
1211 Geneva 14
Switzerland
E-mail: Antoine.Geissbuhler@hcuge.ch
www.IMIA.org


Prof. Dr. Reinhold Haux
President of IMIA
Technical University of Braunschweig
Institute for Medical Informatics
Muehlenpfordtstr. 23
38106 Braunschweig
Germany
E-mail: r.haux@mi.tu-bs.de
www.IMIA.org

Prof. Dr. S. Yunkap Kwankam
Coordinator eHealth
WHO Designated Technical Officer for relations with IMIA
World Health Organization
20, Avenue Appia
1211 Geneva 27
Switzerland
E-mail: kwankamy@who.int
www.WHO.int

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