President’s column: AMIA — Expanding and Extending Our Reach

In my last editorial, I spoke of new beginnings and new opportunities for AMIA. As I mentioned at that time, we are on the cusp of a new decade in healthcare where informatics will contribute substantially to framing the delivery of healthcare. We are at the formative stages of the decade of informatics!! In an effort to support this development, AMIA is launching two new programs in 2013 which will influence and strengthen informatics science and practice in the healthcare community.

First, the most inspiring aspect of the possibilities in 2013 is that we have the opportunity to increase our focus on the traditional academic and research strengths of AMIA by extending our efforts and initiatives to include the full spectrum of biomedical informatics. Specifically, we intend for AMIA to serve as the professional home for informaticians not only in the traditional spheres of academia and research, but also in translational bioinformatics and clinical research informatics along with operational informatics, the new emerging field which encompasses clinical science, consumer health, public health, and other more applied aspects of the healthcare informatics field. There are very few organizations that can claim a multidisciplinary perspective and—while we are far from perfect in serving the unique needs of the very diverse constituency of informaticians professionals—we are working diligently to engage our members in the hard work that deploys healthcare informatics in ways that more effectively serve the healthcare industry.

So, why AMIA? AMIA is the place for weaving together the healthcare leaders who support the interconnected, multidisciplinary analytic threads that govern our healthcare systems and delivery processes. My professional background is varied and has allowed me to observe global healthcare delivery and connect with many talented colleagues across the world. With great confidence I propose that our members are, indeed, true virtuosos because we are the professionals who will help alter the direction of healthcare! We are the experts who will create the knowledge that drives efficiencies, increases productivity, improves outcomes, enhances service capability, and, most importantly, radically improves healthcare.

Earlier this month, AMIA presented another stellar Joint Summit on Translational Bioinformatics and Clinical Research Informatics (TBI/CRI) Science. The conference was originally launched in 2009 to serve the ever growing population of academics and researchers interested in translational bioinformatics, and then expanded to include the clinical research informatics community. When we added the clinical research element to the conference, we did not know that big data and the electronic health record (EHR) would be central features of the clinical research informatics agenda. In fact, healthcare reform and the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act were only ambitious ideas at the time. Subsequently, the Joint Summits have become the forum for offering AMIA members the opportunity to interact and share best ideas and practices that can truly impact the delivery of healthcare.

Following in the innovative footsteps of the Joint Summits, AMIA is now rolling out two new programs in the next year. The aim of these initiatives is to extend the impact of informatics data, knowledge, and information management related to operational informatics. So, what is that? Operational informatics is very process focused and includes the actual deployment of informatics tools and capabilities for improving outcomes, reducing costs, and enhancing services, that is, for radically improving healthcare. After all, at the end of the day, we are in the field of informatics to make healthcare better! Operational informatics is where the rubber hits the road…

Our objectives at AMIA are to take risks and reach beyond our comfort zone by asking new questions. We are the professionals who can answer the questions healthcare professionals should be asking even though they may be unaware that they should be raising these queries—that’s informatics! I encourage you to visit www.amia.org for more information on our emerging program offerings. But, here’s a preview of some of the more important initiatives we are supporting in the coming year.

www.iHealthconference.org—In the midst of the rapid implementation of EHR systems and with the use of analytics and big data in healthcare settings, the importance of operational informatics has grown by leaps and bounds. While AMIA has always served the broad spectrum of informaticians and practitioners involved in operational informatics, we felt it was important to highlight the unique subject matter and interests of those professionals who use informatics tools to affect care delivery in a very direct fashion. The end result is the offering of a new ‘iHealth Conference’ or ‘i’ to the sixth power (see below), specifically directed at practitioners in the field. Our goal is to offer informaticians the best research and information on the applied fields that can be taken home tomorrow morning and applied to make healthcare better.

We intend to offer the iHealth Conference in conjunction with AMIA’s launch of Clinical Informatics Subspecialty Certification Exam Preparation Courses. The first meeting will be held in Orlando, Florida on January 30–February 1, 2014. I hope you will join us!

iHealth is an attempt to proactively extend the existing knowledge and capability built into the traditional academic and research foundations of AMIA. AcademyHealth, the leading association representing the health services research community, will be co-hosting the meeting. In addition, the Association of Medical Directors of Information Systems (AMDIS) and the American Nursing Informatics Association (ANIA) will serve as co-sponsors. We intend for iHealth to be the forum for clinical informatics professionals who are actively engaged in applying informatics tools to enhance efficiency, reduce costs, and increase quality. We hope you join us…

I encourage you to visit our new website for the iHealth Conference at www.iHealthconference.org.

The purpose of the Messages from AMIA section is to provide a forum for AMIA to inform and involve its current and potential members about the goals and the directions of the association. These messages, which reflect the directions and opinions of AMIA leaders only, are intended to inspire members and readers to connect with the association on strategic objectives and activities. See also www.amia.org/presidents-page.
The iHealth Conference is grounded on six core principles of:

- Capture INFORMATION about the INDIVIDUAL and apply INFORMATICS to create INTELLIGENCE that drives INNOVATION to radically IMPROVE health care.

iHealth is designed to appeal to decision makers, strategic planners, and clinicians charged with understanding the big picture and improving outcomes and lowering costs; bottom-line analysts such as managers and physician/nurse executives who are engaged in transforming the business and practice of healthcare delivery; financial executives who need move the margins using operational informatics; and Chief Medical Informatics Officers/Chief Nursing Informatics Officers (CMIOs/CNIOs) seeking to deepen the information base underlying critical decision-making by CMIO/CNIO teams. We intend for the iHealth Conference to be the essential resource in the operational informatician’s tool box when making system investments that produce measurable results.

Clinical Informatics Subspecialty Certification Exam Preparation Program—In 2013, AMIA will introduce a series of educational programs in support of the Clinical Informatics Subspecialty Certification Exam Preparation Program. William Hersh, MD, FACP, FACMI—an internationally recognized expert in the field of informatics—will lead the AMIA program efforts. Hersh is very well known in informatics circles as the Professor and Chair of the Department of Medical Informatics and Clinical Epidemiology at Oregon Health and Science University.

The Clinical Informatics Subspecialty course is the culmination of a multi-year initiative to elevate clinical informatics within the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS). Clinical informatics will now be a subspecialty that provides certification through an examination administered by the American Board of Preventive Medicine. Certification will be available to physicians already certified by ABMS family medicine, internal medicine or any other recognized primary specialty. The first Clinical Informatics Subspecialty Certification Exam will be held on October 7–18, 2013 and is open to all candidates who hold a pre-existing specialty certification in a primary specialty recognized by the ABMS. Information on certification guidelines can be found at www.theabpm.org. Sign up for information about AMIA’s at www.amia.org/request-preparatory-coursework.

Clinical informatics is joining other recognized subspecialties such as pediatric anesthesiology, medical toxicology, sports medicine, geriatric medicine, and cardiovascular disease. Clinical informatics certification will be based on a rigorous set of core competencies, heavily influenced by publications on the subject to be authored by AMIA and its members, many of whom have pioneered the field and supported the new status of clinical informatics as an ABMS-recognized specialty. To prepare physicians who wish to sit for this examination, the AMIA Clinical Informatics Subspecialty Certification Exam Preparation Course materials will be available both online and through in-person courses offered in the late spring and summer of 2013.

Support of the clinical informatics medical subspecialty is consistent with the current emphasis on broadening and professionalizing the health information technology workforce. With a requirement over the next decade for more than 50 000 informatics professionals in the US health sector, the focus on physician informatics expertise is but one element of our ongoing efforts. We also intend to develop an Advanced Inter-Professional Informatics Certification Program which will serve as a companion program for those individuals who do not qualify for the medical certification. As a multi-disciplinary profession, we recognize that support for all healthcare informatics professionals—regardless of their professional training background—is crucial. We intend to meet their professional needs. While the CIS-Prep examination is a step in the right direction, it is a single step. We need to do more, and we will…

In sum, there are many changes afoot at AMIA and we hope that you will engage with us in the coming months and years. If you have ideas… if you have thoughts… if you have alternative approaches, please send your perspectives to drkevin@amia.org. I look forward to hearing from you in the future. More later… as always…

Kevin M Fickenscher

Correspondence to Dr Kevin M Fickenscher, AMIA, 4720 Montgomery Lane, Suite 500, Bethesda, MD 20814, USA; drkevin@amia.org

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