As those who attend both the AMIA symposia and the annual meetings of the Academy for Health Services Research and Health Policy (formerly, the Association for Health Services Research) can attest, there has been far too little productive research collaboration between the fields of informatics and health services research. Gaps in coordination among informaticians and health services researchers are particularly ironic in that the opportunities for productive collaboration have never been greater. Many integrated delivery systems and insurers now have access to databases that combine clinical and claims data and are applicable to a wide range of research questions. Many new information technologies and systems are being applied in the health arena. Yet there is a dearth of the expertise required to exploit the research potential of the databases or to undertake credible evaluations of the impact of the new technologies and systems.

In January 2000, the National Library of Medicine (NLM) and the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) cosponsored a training workshop with the title “Medical Informatics and Health Services Research: Bridging the Gap.” The workshop focused on the need to increase the pool of investigators trained and motivated to work on the challenging research issues that lie at the intersection of medical informatics and health services research.*

Workshop participants, who were primarily program directors and faculty at NLM- and AHRQ-funded pre- and postdoctoral training programs† for informatics or health services research, met at the NLM for

*In this introduction and its companion papers, the term health services research refers to several disciplines: health services research, clinical research, epidemiology and public health research. See Mandl and Lee† for detailed definitions of each.
Leaders in the field of informatics and health services research gave framing presentations on the need for research that encompasses both the informatics and health services research perspectives, the contributions that each field can make to the other, and the current state of research training in the two fields. Small breakout sessions were held to discuss what competencies were needed for research that spans the methodologies of informatics and health services research; options for developing and delivering new curriculum content; and strategies for fostering collaboration between existing informatics and health services research training programs and possibly developing new joint programs. The workshop concluded with the development of prioritized recommendations for future action.

This issue of JAMIA contains a group of papers emanating from the workshop. Mandl and Lee present the case for greater integration of health services research and informatics, focusing on the need for dual training at the clinical, health systems, and policy levels. Examples in their paper address the benefits of existing collaborations between health services researchers and informaticians and the expanding opportunities for fruitful collaboration. Shortliffe and Garber present lessons learned from the highly successful collaboration between the Stanford programs in these two fields. Finally, Corn, Rudzinski, and Cahn summarize recommendations from the workshop and describe follow-on activities planned and under way at NLM and AHRQ.

References
