



CANADA'S HEALTH  
INFORMATICS ASSOCIATION

- DON NEWSHAM -

# A Health "Care" Opportunity Worth Millions

Don Newsham is the President of COACH: Canada's Health Informatics Association



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**S**omewhere over the misty lochs and mountains of Carlisle Scotland on December 18, 2004, I discovered how to make my first million!!

Since at least the time of Marc Lalonde's 1974 New Perspective on the Health of Canadians, we have been aware of the impact of environment, lifestyle, and other behavioural, social and economic factors in determining health. (coincidentally, the year before the beginnings of COACH). Many of us who work in the health system know in our hearts that much more can and should be done to connect and address the other determinants of health to provide complete health care and increase well-being!!

I'm regularly reminded of the health challenges of my two widowed neighbors, as they receive home care, meals on wheels, yard services, and most recently temporary long term care, as they both attempted to manage well in their own homes. We all hear the challenge of making sure our children in need don't fall through the cracks, our homeless receive meals, shelter and support services and our mentally ill are found, tracked and sustained in their battle for wellness.

Beyond the basics, the question is "can health informatics help, right now and for all of our public and neighbors". The answer is a clear yes and therein lies the roots of my new-found venture.

West Lothian Council, a municipality of 160,000 some 30 miles outside of Edinburgh Scotland has launched their e-CARE project that brings together general practitioners, hospitals, social, children, housing and seniors services. This multi-agency organization provides seamless services, shared assessments and case management, front line worker support, and a unified view of the citizens and properties of West Lothian.

After only a few hours with the project director, I was able to see clearly both the scale and impact of their e-CARE project and how the concepts are readily applicable and transferable to our Canadian communities, regions and networks.

The basis of e-CARE is something with which we in Canadian health informatics are all familiar - accurate, timely person identification. The concept is ultimately simple. Apply person identification and management services beyond health care, to children's services, senior's services, the housing programs and other city, municipality or county programs. Take our services beyond the health system to include the roots of health determinants, our social, environmental, and economic services. Add a case management, encounter, referral and private email service to that person identification system and you have the primary components of a full health "care" service.



Now clearly this was not an easy journey for West Lothian. Several long months were spent in achieving consensus and consistency on the data, the identifiers, the policies, the data sharing agreements, etc. Tough challenges, but surmountable and proven. And, there is the obvious first things first principle that we all understand. We have to get our health-based electronic records working well for all (and sooner than later).

However, why not start work in some regions or communities on full integration within the full scope of health care. And, while we're at it, why not expand our work with patients in their home environments, monitoring their blood glucose values and weight while at home, collecting assessment data through the telephone or cell phone or TV, communicating by web-cams, alerting patients who forget to take their medication at the correct time of day by an automatic phone call or text message or email reminder. This idea of bringing care to the people, rather than people to the care has been noted by others. I won't go farther on those possibilities, however such may be the subject of my "second million" venture.

## COACH PATRONS



We do seem to be quite caught up in the current wave of investment in health informatics and without a doubt there is a huge amount of infrastructure, feeder systems, basic registries and repositories all to put in place across Canada. We also seem quite caught up in various pros, cons, rants and raves on the software products on our doorstep. We've got to move beyond that narrow level of thinking, individually and collectively.

Which brings me back to 35,000 feet above Carlisle. Why not me? Why couldn't I help make this happen? Why couldn't I provide this product to Canadians, to our health care providers, our regions and jurisdictions, to Infoway. Why leave it up to others? And of course in the midst of my altruistic thinking.... I could make a million also!! But friends administered a large dose of reality (don't you just hate that?) by reminding me that this was a large jigsaw puzzle,

with many pieces, and no agreement on what the picture is supposed to look like.

However, I'm not giving up. We need to expand the learnings and impact of health informatics to all determinants of health, not just the health care system. We need to find ways to expand the use of the tools we are implementing today, to connect the dots between disparate uses, and to achieve the Lalonde vision of 30 years ago. Now that's a lasting anniversary present for all of us - worth millions, I'd say!



## **COACH was founded 30 years ago!** **1975 - 2005**

COACH, Canada's Health Informatics Association, is excited to be celebrating its 30th anniversary in 2005, and invites the health informatics community to join in the fun. COACH is taking full advantage of this excellent opportunity to celebrate its history and progress, to showcase Canada's health informatics community, and to highlight future initiatives for COACH and for the health informatics community at large.

The 30th anniversary celebrations will kick-off at the Opening Reception at e-Health 2005 on Saturday, April 30th and planned activities throughout 2005 will keep the celebration going all year long:

### **DEVELOPMENT OF A LOGO/SLOGAN TO MARK THE ANNIVERSARY**

COACH is pleased to unveil our 30th anniversary logo on the front cover of this publication.

### **SALE OF 30TH ANNIVERSARY MERCHANDISE**

You'll want to check out the COACH booth at e-Health 2005 and the Web site thereafter ([www.coachorg.com](http://www.coachorg.com)) for your choice of COACH anniversary merchandise.

### **DEVELOPMENT OF A BOOK DESCRIBING THE HISTORY OF HEALTH INFORMATICS IN CANADA AND INTERNATIONALLY**

COACH is very excited about the development of a documented history of health informatics in Canada. The foremost leaders in the field have been recruited to put the last 30 years into context. It is anticipated that the publication will do at least two things: (1) celebrate the history and achievements of the evolution of COACH as an organization and health informatics as a developing sector and profession, and (2) lend context, common understanding, and credibility to this growing field and profession for today's leaders and tomorrow's ambassadors. As well, we anticipate it will be a great read and an excellent resource. Watch for more details on a publication date and how you can get a copy . . . or two!

### **CREATION OF A SPECIAL ANNIVERSARY PUBLICATION**

COACH is also looking to engage the health informatics community by publishing a special anniversary commemorative publication that will explore today's context and contemplate tomorrow's perspective. Between the historical document and the anniversary publication, COACH looks forward to

revisiting the milestones, noting the noteworthy, acknowledging the contributors, and documenting the transformations in technology - from punch cards to portals in only 30 years! Planned publication date is Fall 2005.

### **PUBLICATION OF PROFILES/ESSAYS BY THOUGHT LEADERS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR**

COACH will be inviting today's leaders to contribute to the dialogue throughout the year, in the publications already identified and/or in profiles and essays to be published in this journal and elsewhere. Here's your chance to make a contribution.

### **NEW AWARDS PROGRAM TO BE LAUNCHED DURING THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY YEAR**

COACH, with its values of leadership, collaboration, continuous learning, professionalism and responsiveness, is pleased to announce the establishment of an Awards Program to recognize those individuals who have demonstrated leadership, excellence and/or high level of service within the Canadian health informatics community. The descriptions of the awards, criteria for nominations and deadline for submissions will be available shortly. An awards committee has been established to review the nominations, and awards will be presented at the 30th Anniversary Gala Awards Evening in the Fall of 2005.

### **GALA AWARDS AND RECOGNITION EVENING IN THE FALL OF 2005**

The spotlight will shine on the Who's Who of the health informatics community next Fall when COACH and CHITTA host a night of celebration. Thirty years . . . and the profession is young!

While it is COACH's 30th anniversary as an organization, it is more a celebration of the 30th anniversary of the birth of the field. And all in the field are invited to join the celebrations. What contribution have you made to your chosen profession? What contribution can you make now as we reflect on the past, contextualize the present and contemplate the future? What ideas, stories, photos, suggestions and ideas can you contribute to these celebrations? We look forward to hearing from you! Please contact the COACH office by e-mail at [info@coachorg.com](mailto:info@coachorg.com) or contact any member of the 30th Anniversary Task Force:

Shelagh Maloney, Chair  
Brent McGaw  
Dennis Giokas

Heather Jones  
Steven Huesing  
Warren Winkelman

*Join the celebrations! We only turn 30 once!*

