



The continuous gift of health care complexity

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A recent shared article from the 2005 IMIA Yearbook of Medical Informatics written by Thomas Beale highlighted the challenge and complexity of health informatics, and more importantly, the human body. Since I've reviewed that article, I've had numerous occasions to be reminded why we feel both passionate and overwhelmed in applying information management and technology to the business of health care and the improvement of health outcomes.

A similar presentation at the Alberta Network for Health Information Exchange meeting in early December also noted the complexity of the human organism. From 30,000 genes and 3 billion base pairs to the marvel of the human brain where the gene pathways that may be infected by some sort of 'goo' cause Alzheimer conditions (goo on the brain - now I have the excuse for not remembering your name), to the complexities of our health care system that both heals and hurts, health care is more complex than the 747 referred to in the article by Beale. Now any of us working for any length of time in the health informatics community have well experienced such complexity, but perhaps have never stopped to consider the effect of that complexity on our specific work.

Is it any wonder that our clinicians, trained and skilled in diagnosing and treating the human body, are so strong in demanding accuracy, timeliness, efficiency and time improvements? Is it any wonder that the youngest and oldest of our population are continuously expanding the requirements for hospital, surgical and primary care? We well know our aging boomer population is pushing for access to a longer, more active lifestyle with accompanying surgical fixes and better management of chronic disease. Is it any wonder that our system is being forced by court decision to address the place of private health care services in an over-burdened, over-crowded public care system?

In a complex health care system where 70,000 adverse events may be preventable every year, and between 9,250 to 23,750 deaths from adverse events could have been prevented, help is needed to ensure requirements for safe care are met. With the

demands for access to hip, knee, cataract, cancer and other surgeries that cause waiting lists to exceed 10 months in many communities, our complex health care system needs help. In its recently published *National Health Expenditure Trends*, CIHI announced drug costs and drug therapies exceeded \$24 Billion in 2005, the second largest expenditure of our \$143 Billion health care system. With a rate of growth of 11% per year, we need the best of drug management capabilities, systems and services.

What is the effect of the complexities and relationships of the care of the human body and the demand for quality accessible, safe, and sustainable care services? Where health care almost always consumes the largest portion of any provincial budget and requires the greatest proportion of any community, city or regions human resources, there is no doubt that we must provide better information and technology support to health care than to airplanes, banks and pizza shops.

Do you want out now? Or like almost all of us, do you want to drive forward with passion, diligence, long days and a somewhat crazy desire to make a difference? What a gift this very complex need brings to us in this Christmas season. What gifts can we contribute in return to this work?

I was truly excited hearing a recent presentation on personalized health care. The opportunities in the convergence of the chemistry, biological and informatics sciences and particularly molecular biology are changing the delivery of health care already. Prevention of disease, prospective health care planning, targeted drug therapies, gene based therapies and pre-disposition testing are just some of the new approaches coming out of the complex world of genomics and proteomics.

While the above is quite on the leading edge, so to is the work in Canada on our e-Health Roadmap. Internationally Canada has a growing reputation for excellence, action and investment in health informatics, and well we should. We may feel "in the trenches" day to day, but the real progress in registries, diagnostics imaging, pharmacy, disease management, hospital and community systems

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development and other projects, along with Canada Health Infoway, jurisdictional and regional collaboration, is remarkable. It is a real gift to help address the complex issues facing us everywhere.

All of us working diligently on these and many other health informatics projects are both challenged and appreciative of the role and opportunities we have today. There has never been a better time or a more complex time to be involved in health informatics. What a gift at this Christmas season - one that keeps on giving. And yes, I know, some of you will say my views of gifts needs some additional work.

As 2005 draws to a close, I wish you all the very best for 2006.

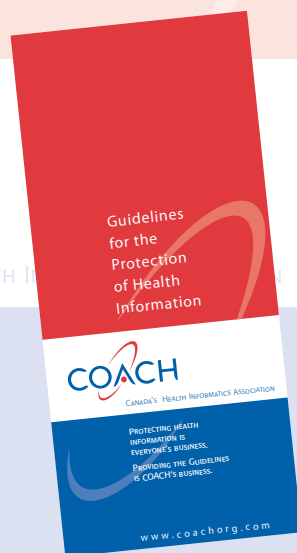


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