



- KAREN MCCARTHY -

e-Health 2002: A resounding success for the third consecutive year!

Karen McCarthy is the Manager of Communications with the Canadian Institute for Health Information.

Canada's health care system is witnessing incredible change and is evolving - with regionalization, federal and provincial commissions recommending new directions, and the rising use of information technology and communications. And how we respond to this change has ushered in a new era of health service delivery - the theme of this year's *e-Health 2002* Conference.

Over 1,400 people participated in *e-Health 2002* held in Vancouver from April 27 to 30 and co-sponsored by the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) and COACH: Canada's Health Informatics Association. Keynote and guest speakers delivered messages that spoke to the changes taking place in healthcare, nothing that information and communication technology is vital to this change.

"The Canadian health care system is in the throes of slow but dramatic reform - reform that is necessary to ensure the continued sustainability of our health care system," said Brendan Seaton, past president of COACH at the opening ceremonies on April 27. "At the heart of that reform is information management and technology - the central nervous system for a new way of managing and delivering health care."

CIHI's President and CEO Richard Alvarez echoed the same sentiment, noting that "e-health can play an enormous part in repairing, improving and preserving our health care system. It offers a means to draw people together in collaborative partnerships - from governments to providers of care to health informaticians."

Mr. Alvarez pointed out that Canadians have become increasingly concerned about aspects of access, universality, and the current definition of comprehensiveness of care. For those responsible for ensuring that the system is there for Canadians, their number one concern is the affordability and sustainability of the system.

And affordability and sustainability were clearly on the mind of the British Columbia Premier Gordon Campbell when he took to the podium at the opening ceremonies of *e-Health 2002*.

"Our health care budgets have increased by 20% in the last two years but our economy only grew by 2%. This is not sustainable in the long term. We cannot maintain the status quo," he said.



Dr. Francis Lau, co-chair, Program Committee addresses delegates.



Networking opportunities abound!



Pat Jeselon, co-chair, with plenary speaker Bonnie Kaplan.

The Premier spoke of the challenges facing the health care system, noting that there are fewer health human professionals, fewer hospital facilities and not enough long-term care beds. He stressed that new innovations and the use of technology are key to finding workable solutions if we are to meet the growing demands for health care services.

“One of the great tools we have that was not there 50 years ago when we were building the health care system is technology - there are tremendous opportunities. Our challenge is to tap into the expertise of people like you.”

The Premier also provided an overview of the many initiatives taking place in British Columbia in an effort to reduce costs and shift funds to focus on patient care. This includes the B.C. HealthGuide Program, designed to provide citizens, where they live, with health information and advice 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to help them manage their personal health risks and conditions confidently, safely and in a timely manner. He also

referred to a telemental health pilot project that enables people with mental illness in British Columbia's northern communities to consult with psychiatrists at major hospitals on the lower mainland by videoconference.

Presentations at *e-Health 2002* explored many e-initiatives and e-innovations underway across Canada, including telehealth and electronic health records. COACH's new President Gil Sampson was pleased with the level of debate and discussion on electronic health records. “If we are to make electronic health records a reality, we need to work together and this means involving patients, physicians, nurses, informaticians, health care providers and governments,” he said.



e-Health 2003: Meet us in Toronto next May!

A Catalyst for Change is the theme for the *e-Health 2003 Conference*, slated to take place from May 24 to 27, 2003, in Toronto at The Westin Harbour Castle Hotel. The Conference is a joint venture of the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) and COACH: Canada's Health Informatics Association.

“We are anticipating an exciting program for 2003,” says Diana Royce, Managing Director of HEALNet and co-chair of next year's conference. She will be working with Shelagh Maloney, VP, Clinical Information and Chief Privacy Officer for THiiNC Information Management Inc.

“We will be working with the broader health informatics community, including academics, health care providers, vendors, policy-makers, health care providers and others, to ensure they will have opportunities to share their knowledge and experience for success when it comes to e-innovations,” she adds.

Conference presentations and posters will be organized around many of the same themes as this year including electronic health records; health information protection: privacy and security; best practices in information management; telehealth; patient safety/adverse events/quality care; and emerging trends/catalysts for change.

Conference information, including sponsorship and exhibit information will be available on the conference Web site at www.e-healthconference.com.



Plenary sessions — filled to the brim!

Pamela Wallin — Closing keynote speaker.