



Michael Nusbaum



Barnabas Walther

- MICHAEL NUSBAUM -

- BARNABAS WALTHER -

A New Frontier for Mental Health Information

Michael Nusbaum, BASc, MHSA, a Victoria - based consultant, is the SYNAPSE Project Director; Barnabas Walther, PhD, is the Regional Director of Mental Health, of the North Shore Health Region in Vancouver, B.C.

Historically overlooked in the development of clinical information systems, Mental Health has recently emerged as one of the priority health care services to be brought into the electronic age. The SYNAPSE Project grew out of this environment, and addresses the problem of a critical lack of integrated information systems for mental health in Canada, resulting from a historical lack of investment in information systems for this complex area of patient/client information management. A lack of standards on mental health information have also impeded the ability of service providers to collect, analyze and share information about their patients and clients across jurisdictions, across regional health services, or even within mental health service areas.

The SYNAPSE Project offers solutions to these problems by facilitating the highest quality of care to clients and patients through the provision of accurate, relevant and timely clinical information at every point of care throughout the mental health continuum (including inpatient Psychiatry and Emergency programs, hospital outpatient programs, community programs and residential programs). This will be achieved through implementation and ongoing enhancement of a client-centered, standards-based electronic health record that supports local, provincial and national requirements. The project integrates key data sources such as provincial demographic and pharmacy registries, and will implement or contribute to the advancement of provincial and national standards for data, technology, and policy.

SYNAPSE was developed as part of a collaborative effort that begun with work developed by the Alberta Mental Health Board (AMHB), and subsequently enhanced by the North Shore Health Region in Vancouver. The system has attracted interest and support by an increasing number of additional health authorities across Canada. The collaborative has actively focused SYNAPSE towards full interoperability, and the data model now reflects standards in place

or in development in the provinces, in Canada, and internationally. Joint initiatives with CIHI and MHECCU are intended to test these data standards on the front lines. In addition, the SYNAPSE data model is currently helping to facilitate the development of a minimum data set (MDS) for mental health in a number of Canadian jurisdictions. On-going efforts are being directed towards the licensing and deployment of the RAI-Mental Health instrument within the SYNAPSE application itself.

The SYNAPSE Project was recently awarded CHIPP funding through Health Canada's Health Infostructure initiative, and is being expanded in both function and scope.

As part of an agreement with the AMHB, SYNAPSE is offered at no cost to any public health care organization in Canada. Collaborative development is encouraged for the protection and adoption of data, technology and policy standards.

The North Shore Health Region, the lead applicant for this project, serves a population of approximately 200,000 located on Vancouver's north shore. This health authority employs 3,500, including over 240 medical staff (14 Psychiatrists). Partners include health authorities that are adjacent (Coast Garibaldi, Sea-to-Sky, Powell River, Sechelt), and distant (Northern Interior RHB). Together with current partners, the combined population served exceeds 500,000. While the North Shore Health Region continues officially as the lead applicant and sponsor of the CHIPP-funded portion of the project, a non-profit consortium will be created where the partners can oversee, support and promote SYNAPSE on an equal basis.

