



- SERGE J. TAILLON, CIHI COLUMNIST -

Conferencing in Uncertain Times

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For many of us, the tragic events of September 11 had a tremendous impact on our personal and professional lives. On 11/09 and ensuing days, we were glued to our television sets feeling both shock and disbelief. In time, those who were stranded were able to get home and our leaders urged us to resume our regular lives.

But, with America's response, the possibility of further terrorism and the current economic conjecture, we can expect uncertainty to be the norm for some time to come. The fact is - it is not business as usual. For example, both in the USA and Canada, health care conferences are reporting dramatic reductions in registration and many events have been cancelled.

It is in this context that CIHI co-hosted with inteRAI's Canadian centre - New Frontiers in Health Information - a Case Mix and Quality Assurance conference. Based on past years' experience, five hundred participants were expected to attend. By mid-October, registration was far from encouraging and (we) the organizers were forced to make some tough decisions. Communication strategies were re-examined for opportunities to further disseminate information about the conference to key stakeholders, especially

those we were apt to travel by car. Our decision to go forward turned out to be a wise one. Three hundred and seventy-five delegates participated, many of who registered within the last few days.

The participants gave high ratings to all aspects of the conference. Speakers and presenters were described as exceptional, giving genuine insights into the current status of Case Mix and Quality Assurance across the nation and globally. It would have been a great loss to postpone or cancel this event, as the enthusiasm that was generated will reverberate positively throughout the health care community.

The fact is that conferences do hold an element of celebration. Moreover, key health care conferences can help to stimulate professional networking, the sharing of ideas and the trickle down dissemination of information. Health professionals have a responsibility to be part of that process. While overall health care conference attendance may diminish over the short term, the value and importance of the outcome of these conferences will not. The bottom line is that conferences work and can continue to work even in a society where terrorism has been driven up the agenda!



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