

**Prof. Denis Protti**  
**University of Victoria**  
**Victoria, BC**

**September 20, 2008**

Dear Steven,

On September 10, 2008 I was honored by the Canadian Health Leadership Network (CHLNet) as the first recipient of their new Mac Naught – Taillon Leadership Award in Health Policy, Health Information & Health Informatics. I would like to share the background of this award with your readership; it is a big part of our industry's history.

The Award was established to commemorate the outstanding and lasting contributions of Don MacNaught and Serge Taillon to the Canadian health care system. Beginning in the mid-1980s in the Health Information Division of Health Canada, Don and Serge worked side by side to contribute their leadership in a spirit of cooperation to initiatives such as the National Health Information Council and the National Health Information Task Force. Their vision, stamina and perseverance contributed significantly to the realization of the Canadian Institute for Health Information in 1994. Whereas Don has been referred to as "Mr. Medicare" by former Health Minister Hon. Monique Bégin, it is equally fitting to call Serge "Mr. Health Information".

Dennis Niebergal, President of CLINICARE also needs be recognized for his corporate contribution to this award and to the bursary which accompanies it. Dennis continues to provide leadership through his ongoing support of new initiatives in Canada's health care system. Thank you Dennis.

Along my 40+ year journey, I have had the privilege to meet a wide array of superb people – intellectual giants and in many cases wonderful people with whom I became personal friends. Two of the gentle men ---- and I use that word in its true meaning --- were Don MacNaught and Serge Taillon, both of Ottawa and both with Health Canada when I first met them.

Don and Serge were instrumental in the formation of CIHI – our very Canadian and highly respected health data gathering agency. Don and Serge worked tirelessly both on the front lines and in the background to stick handle the merger of the MIS Group, HMRI, and the Information division of Health Canada and a portion of the health Statistics division of Statistics Canada. It was not an amalgamation that went entirely smoothly and it took much tact, diplomacy and political smarts to make it happen --- thanks in a very large part to Don and Serge.

Don MacNaught had a passion for Canadian health care brought about undoubtedly by the key role he played in drafting the Canada Health Act with Monique Bégin. Later, he was a critical player in the National Health Information Council (NHIC) – the precursor to CIHI. He was outraged at the poor quality and quantity of health information we were able to produce; he had a vision that a CIHI was what we needed. He was well aware that in promoting the findings of the Wilkes Task Force which made the formal recommendation to create CIHI, he was doing himself out of a job.

Don was a master at federal-provincial negotiations and on more than one occasion, he resolved an impending crisis. He was an effective influencer, helping convince the reluctant provinces to take part and join in. He later



Dennis Niebergal, Don  
MacNaught, and Brendan  
Seaton, INFocus 2000

convinced Dick Alvarez that CIHI did not have enough content on technical information standards. As a result the still running CIHI Partnership was created - which I had the good fortune of chairing for a number of years – a small point that Don was fond of never letting me forget.

I will always remember Don for the many long, philosophical and fervent discussions we had about health information issues not only in Canada but around the world. I served on Statistics Canada's Health Advisory Committee for many years and as a result would visit Ottawa several times a year. While in our nation's capital, I would use the occasion to visit with colleagues in the local hospitals, at the University and in Health Canada.

Don was almost always one of the people I looked forward to meeting with --- not only because I knew that we would have a stimulating conversation but also that we would usually do so over a meal of some form of hot and spicy food. Don and I shared a passion for spicy food --- we would try to outdo each whenever we visited each other's city. We agreed on the type of food but not the drink --- Don loved his beer and I preferred wine.

As most of you know, Serge chose to transfer from Health Canada to join CIHI where he played a stabilizing and influential role as Director of Client Relations and Communications. In May 2005, he was named Executive Director, Quebec. Not only did he develop client services and strengthen CIHI's ties with its many Quebec partners --- he almost single-handedly managed to convince the province to become a full member of the CIHI family. There is no doubt in anyone's mind that the esteem and praise that CIHI now enjoys is due in a large part to Serge's quiet and unassuming work behind the scenes. As Jennifer Zelmer told me just last week – 'Serge was the heart of the organization'. *Bien fait Serge mon ami – bien fait.*

Over his distinguished 25-year career in the health field, he has served on the boards of several health organizations including being the first Chair of the Canadian Cochrane Network and Centre Advisory Board; Chair of the Research Coordinating Committee at CHEO in Ottawa; and an active member of the Federal, Provincial and Territorial Advisory Committee on Population Health Working Group on the Report on the Health of Canadians. He also worked very closely with Richard Alvarez in the critical years preceding the formation of another Canadian institution of which we are also proud – Canada Health Infoway.

Serge and I share a different passion – non-edible - that of developing a cadre of new professionals, trained to work with information in a wide range of health care settings. Serge is a dedicated supporter of our School of Health Information and always asks me when we get together how it is doing. Well Serge, it is doing quite well thank you. It has graduated over 700 health informatics professionals who are now working around the world. There are currently over 150 undergraduate students graduate students studying with us at UVic and preparing to enter the workforce. We have a compliment of 6 full-time faculty members and have just received approval to add two more. We continue to be one of the largest health informatics programs in the world.

I know that Serge is particularly proud of one our School's alumni, namely Dr. Jennifer Zelmer with whom he worked very closely at CIHI. After many years of dedicated service to Canada's health care system, she has now moved into the international scene and is the first President and CEO of the International Health Terminology Standards Development Organization based in Copenhagen, Denmark. Serge is undoubtedly proud that next year she will return to the University of Victoria as the keynote speaker of our bi-annual international conference, ITCH 2009.

In closing, may I add that I have had the good fortune of spending a significant amount of time overseas and it never ceases to make proud to be a Canadian when I see the high regard with which both CIHI and Infoway are held by the international health informatics community. They are both held up as stellar examples for other nations to imitate.

I wish to thank CHLNet for this honor. I will attempt to live up to the recognition they have bestowed up me by continuing to contribute (for a few years yet) to the improvement of our health care system through the effective use of information technology and the dissemination of more accurate, more reliable and more helpful information -- be it in a clinical setting to assist clinicians in the delivery of care or to assist managers, planners, policy makers, and researchers in the many government based settings that exist across our country.

*Encore une fois, merci a tout.*

*Denis Protti*



Portrait – Serge Taillon

