



CANADA'S HEALTH  
INFORMATICS ASSOCIATION



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## The Future – it's Here

*"The future is not so hard to predict.  
It's already here. It's just not equally distributed."*

**William Gibson, Futurist**

I love this quote. I think it's a wonderful encapsulation of the work that we are doing in health informatics.

There are increasing numbers of pockets of innovation across the country, indeed around the world. Examples of 'the future' unequally distributed though they are, offer fascinating views into the potential that is e-health.

I had the opportunity to attend a conference earlier this spring where there was excellent discussion and debate about what the health system would/should/could look like in 2020 given the global changes that are affecting how we live. Advances in information, communication and technology (ICT) and the pace of change are unprecedented. I am reminded of this all too often when my children look at me with a mixture of shock and pity when I explain that there were no microwaves or home computers or cell phones when I was a girl – and, in the 'olden days', we didn't even have the internet. Technology advances, including breakthroughs in medical technology will continue at an astonishing rate. Imagine the efficiency, effectiveness and safety gains that will result when detailed information about your genotype and your clinical data are used to select a medication, therapy or prevention that is uniquely suited to you. This form of personalized medicine is not far off. Healthcare will become wellness care, making pre-symptomatic diagnostics and treatments commonplace.

Imagine also the impact of the aging population and consumerism on the health system. An increased burden of chronic diseases, the democratization of knowledge and growing expectations of 'prosumers' (proactive consumers) have already begun to change how, when and why we access the system. Canadians are taking a more active role in their health. In fact, it is estimated that approximately 60% of us research information before seeing our care providers. What will be the impact to the system when direct-to-consumer advertising suited to our individual health profiles and those of our families is accessible through enabling technologies? How will that affect our ability to manage an aging parent's chronic disease or to diagnose a child's ailment? How will this empowerment affect our interaction with our health team?

It's fascinating to conjecture what the health system in 2020 will look like; each of us probably has a different vision of the future but I suspect that one of the elements that our visions have in common is the presence of a health informatics influence. For example, the skills required to ensure that accurate and relevant information is available to providers and consumers, or to ensure that enabling technologies meet the needs of users or to ensure that solutions are developed in a secure environment that respects patient confidentiality require a set of competencies that are best represented in a health informatics professional.

In keeping with two of its strategic directions, to advance the health informatics profession and to advance health informatics professionals, COACH engaged a number of thought leaders – academics, CIOs, students, Board members, government representatives, members of other associations – to consider much of the good work that has already been done in this area and to identify the unique blend of core competencies that make one a health informatics professional (HIP). Drawing on skills from the information sciences, the health sciences and management sciences. Health Informaticians are demonstrating leadership and will continue to play a vital role in defining the health system today and into the future.

As our future becomes more equally distributed and as we get more frequent glimpses of it, we will continue to see a strong contribution from the health informatics community. Some of these contributions will be showcased in our national conference, e-Health 2007 Paths to Transformation.

See you (and the future) there! ●



# Health



Quebec City  
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