



Don Newsham, President, COACH



Who Do You Call? How Do You Know? It Could Be 1-800-coach

I always wanted to be an HL7 message developer and now – darn it – I am one. I can identify a dozen common standards acronyms by sight, I can spell ‘realm localization’ and I have one of those wall sized RIM charts in my cubicle. I’m a professional standards developer! Oh and by the way, my rate is only \$175 an hour.

I should have also included in that un-solicited advertisement above that I have energy, drive, enthusiasm and passion for standards. But you know that and yet I’m fairly sure my e-mail won’t be overflowing tomorrow with calls for professional assistance to build HL7 messages. Why? I don’t have the qualifications, experience and credentials that are accepted and recognized as defining true standards development professionals, for which there are many that thankfully do toil successfully every day across our country.

COACH, along with other organizations in the world of health informatics, has over the last two years recognized the one huge resource needed beyond money. We need the top quality health informatics (HI) professionals to build and support the Canadian health infrastructure. Even now we risk burning out our industry stalwarts in positions of leadership, delivery and management if we do not build more resource capacity. Help is needed!

One of COACH’s strategic goals is to “enhance the practice of health informatics as a profession”, and under that goal, to “establish minimum standards of professional practice for Health Informatics”. And we are well on our way to enhancing and establishing.

Over the past year, COACH has taken the first steps in achieving those goals through initiatives to further

evolve health informatics as a profession. These include:

- Completion of a key study (“white paper”) in May of 2005 summarizing characteristics of professions, differences between registration, certification and licensure, the landscape of current programs for professional credentialing in other professions or similar associations (CCHSE, CHIMA, CIPS, HIMSS, and UKCHIP), and both the potential benefits and challenges of HI certification;
- Initiation of a process to assess the need and appropriateness of a Health Informatics Code of Ethics and the potential adoption of the IMIA Code of Ethics within Canada;
- Launching of our Health Informatics Professionalism (HIP) Steering Committee for the purpose of exploring professional credentialing options and developing a recommended strategy with the goal of evolving health informatics as a profession; and
- Developing a professionalism options and policy paper (“green paper”) for discussion and implementing a consultation process involving COACH members, related organizations, the academic community and the broader health informatics community to seek direction and build consensus.

These are all important building blocks to determine and initiate the right plan to enhance and establish the practice of health informatics as a profession. Important, but insufficient.

In health informatics we all know about the “push and pull” principle. That is, push data out to those who should have it or pull data in as needed. Or, in

this case, do we build and push policy out, or do we identify business needs first from the ground floor up and then build policy to address identified needs.

Regardless of whether we need 1,500 or 2,000 or 9,000 new HI professionals, depending on the numbers reported in reputable articles, we know that right now, right where we work, we need more people. Not just warm bodies but capable, experienced, credentialed members of our health information management and delivery teams. How do we find them? How do we know potential candidates have what it takes?

We've all developed or answered ads or RFP's for resources. And we've all answered those ads based on a combination of what was requested and what we have on our personal talent list – hoping for a match. There are no standard lists for health informatics qualifications, notwithstanding certification credentials in specific disciplines like project management, J2EE developers or XML coders. We don't have a standardized, Canada-wide, defined body of knowledge for health informatics, notwithstanding excellent starting points through past COACH and academic initiatives. And we're just starting to observe RFP's asking for minimum post secondary health informatics qualifications for resources.

You, as the seeking and employing members of our HI community, are being increasingly required to push, call for and require greater and standardized evidence of qualifications, credentials and experience. It happens to you when you look elsewhere for a job or engagement and it is happening as you look for your resources.

COACH needs your help. Engage with us when we provide sessions, surveys or other opportunities to participate in developing the options, plans and policies related to health informatics professionalism. We will be communicating with you much further in the months ahead. Let us know what you are requiring in hiring or engaging resources to fulfill your people needs. Push us and the health informatics community in identifying ethical principles, evaluating options for the adoption of a Code of Ethics, defining the body of knowledge and developing options for the recognition of standard qualifications. Your input will ensure that we keep the real business needs of our community in the forefront of all professionalism initiatives.

Finally, don't lose that passion, drive and enthusiasm for working in the best community of professionals in Canada. Whatever your role, you know who to talk to and you know what to do – to build the best e-health capability for everyone (and to build HL7 messages using truly qualified professionals – you're right "I got no mail"!) We want COACH to continue to be on your list for resource building and qualifying.

My closing words and a real "ad"!

e is for Everyone. - e-Health 2006 is just around the corner running from April 30 to May 3rd , 2006. THE Conference you can't afford to miss and the opportunity to experience spring in Victoria, BC - register now!

Warm regards,

Don ●

2005-2006 COACH Board of Directors

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