

Let a Thousand Flowers Bloom: Transition towards Implementation of the IMIA Strategic Plan

P. Murray, Interim Vice President Strategic Planning Implementation, International Medical Informatics Association

R. Haux, President, International Medical Informatics Association

N. Lorenzi, Past President, International Medical Informatics Association

Summary

Objective: IMIA, the International Medical Informatics Association, has adopted the IMIA Strategic Plan, "Towards IMIA 2015". In order to turn the vision into reality, we invite all members of IMIA, and others with an interest in our work, to engage in activities designed to achieve the key strategic goals of the plan.

Methods: IMIA members and others are invited to study the IMIA Strategic Plan, and consider developing, or contributing to, proposals that can support the implementation of one or more parts of the Strategic Plan. IMIA has allocated a proportion of reserve funds for projects supporting the implementation of the plan, and proposals can be submitted to the Interim Vice President for Strategic Planning Implementation.

Results and Conclusions: Several projects are already being undertaken to support implementation of the IMIA Strategic Plan. IMIA looks forward to its members undertaking further projects, targeted at achieving its strategic goals and making the vision a reality by 2015.

Keywords

International Medical Informatics Association, IMIA, health informatics, medical informatics, strategy

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Introduction

The governing General Assembly of IMIA, the International Medical Informatics Association, unanimously approved the IMIA Strategic Plan on August 18, 2007 when it met prior to Medinfo2007 in Brisbane, Australia. The IMIA Strategic Plan, titled "Towards IMIA 2015" [1], sets out a vision and strategic goals for IMIA, but as is known only too well, strategies are only starting points, and need considerable effort to turn them into realities.

IMIA is now turning attention to the implementation of the IMIA Strategic Plan, with the motto "let a thousand flowers bloom" signifying the wide range of activities and interactions we wish to encourage. A "Transition Plan" is being developed. Supported by the continuing work of a planning team, and lead by a new IMIA Vice President with specific responsibilities for implementation of the Strategic Plan, IMIA intends to work towards turning the vision into reality. We invite all members of the IMIA "family", and all with interest in, and links to, our work to become involved in contributing to the implementation of the IMIA Strategic Plan. We are seeking suggestions from all parts of the IMIA "family" for projects, proposals, and comments.

Background

The background to the development of the IMIA Strategic Plan has been presented elsewhere [2, 3], but it is useful to briefly re-

iterate the process. The concept of an IMIA Strategic Plan started in 2003. Following a world-wide survey conducted during 2003 and 2004, to assess what IMIA members would like to see IMIA do or become within the next 5-10 years, a strategic planning task force was appointed in 2004. Lead by then IMIA President Nancy Lorenzi, the task force members included Floyd Eisenberg (USA), H. M. Goh (Malaysia), Steven Huesing (Canada), Fernando Martin-Sanchez (Spain), Lincoln de Assis Moura, Jr. (Brazil), Peter Murray (UK), and Heather Strachan (UK), who represented the many parts of the IMIA family, i.e. national societies, working and special interest groups, and academic and corporate institutional members.

Over the three years from 2004 to 2007, the task force held physical meetings and virtual discussions, and consulted widely with all parts of the IMIA "family". By an iterative process addressing general principles and specific aspects of the plan, we developed the components of the IMIA Strategic Plan. This culminated in a vision for how IMIA should be by 2015, and an Integrated Strategic Framework Model, underpinned by IMIA's Guiding Principles.

The 2007 IMIA General Assembly unanimously approved the plan and supported the recommendation to use up to US\$50,000 to nurture and encourage strategic efforts outlined in the plan that would enhance informatics around the world. The General Assembly recommended that the concept of a Vice President for Strategic Planning be further considered and pre-

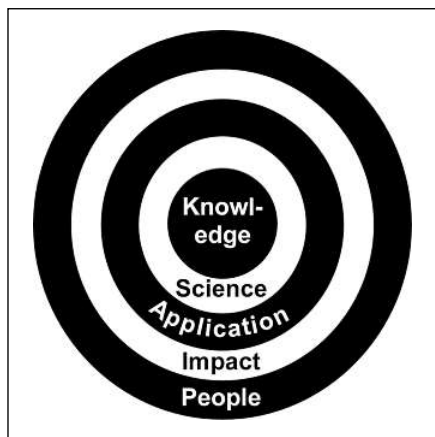


Fig. 1 The five circles of the IMIA Integrated Strategic Planning Framework

presented to the General Assembly meeting in Sweden in 2008.

The IMIA Strategic Plan – a Summary

The Integrated Strategic Framework Model (also known as the IMIA “rainbow umbrella”) provides a multidimensional visual representation of the scope of IMIA’s areas of legitimate interest and activity, connections and integration possibilities. From these arise a future structure and processes

for IMIA and its work to evolve. This multidimensional model comprises five concentric circle layers (see Fig. 1) and six sectors to the overall circle (see Fig. 2). Each circle and each sector describes a component of IMIA.

Knowledge is the central core of IMIA, thus in the center of the model. All of IMIA’s strategies, interactions and efforts emanate from this knowledge core. The second circle, directly touching the knowledge core, represents the science layer, portraying IMIA members’ connection and integration with the science and discovery of informatics. The third circle represents the application of scientific discoveries, including the multiple questions and issues that are created and disseminated in informatics. The fourth circle represents IMIA’s impact layer, referring to the potential impact that IMIA and its members can have on governments, nations, outcomes, health professionals, and all other stakeholders. The fifth, and outermost, circle represents the people layer, the level at which IMIA interacts with individuals, citizen organizations, personal health involvement, dissemination and acceptance, enabling personal responsibility, and public/personal health.

The second dimension of the Strategic Plan represents the various key sectors that IMIA as an international association must address. Superimposed on the five concentric circle layers of IMIA’s integration and connection to others are six major sectors.

Knowledge is at the center of each of the six sectors. At the top of the circles is the health sector; since the prime element of our vision is to improve health, this sector highlights our vision and the strategic goals supporting this sector. The other sectors are research/science (including how we understand and create evidence to support health); the behavioral responsibility (ethics) sector that refers to our ethical and social responsibility; education (including best practices in educating ourselves and others); the multiple types of relationships (communications and connections to build relationships among stakeholders); and finally the sixth sector is the reach (equity) of IMIA, our obligation to share, distribute and disseminate. It is not possible here to provide the full detail of the model, especially the detailed description of the components and the multicolor, multidimensional graphic representation; the current version can be downloaded for study and comment from the IMIA website [1].

Towards Implementation

We know from research into information system failures [4] and also from errors within hospitals, that the time of “hand-offs”, “hand-overs”, “cut-overs”, or other such transitions are the times when there is a higher probability for problems, issues, failures, and errors to occur. In order to avoid that phenomenon, IMIA created its “Transition Plan” as a bridge to the future.

For each of the six sectors of the IMIA Conceptual Strategic Planning Framework (the vision, research, behavioral responsibility, education, relation and research), the IMIA Strategic Plan outlines strategic goals. A number of possible projects, designed to assist in achieving the strategic goals, have been identified, and some of these have already started. However, IMIA is seeking suggestions, and specific projects proposals, from all IMIA members – national societies, regional groups, Working and Special Interest Groups, and institutional members – who are interested in undertaking any of these projects on behalf of IMIA; or in proposing additional projects

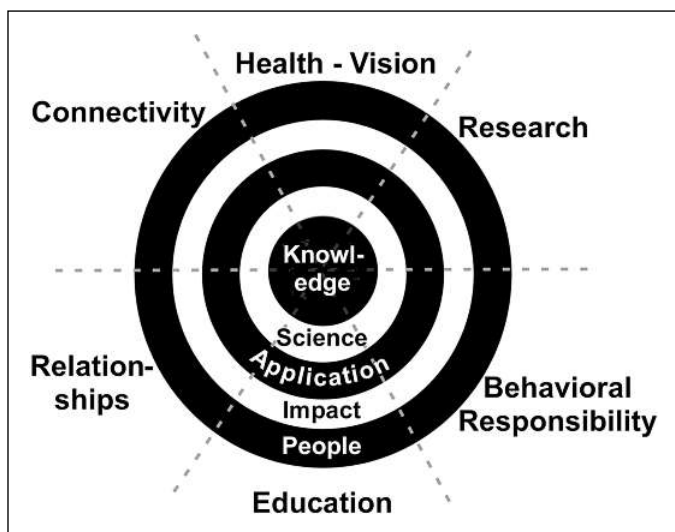


Fig. 2 The five circles and six sectors of the IMIA Integrated Strategic Planning Framework

that can assist in the implementation of the IMIA Strategic Plan.

One of the projects that has already started is the BCS/IMIA Knowledge Core project, being undertaken by the British Computer Society, the UK National member of IMIA, and CHIRAD, an Academic Institutional member of IMIA, that is working to update the IMIA Scientific Content Map [5]. Another newer project is the Bioinformatics Knowledge Mapping Project, chaired by Peter Elkin, which intersects with the previous project. In addition, APAMI, the Asia Pacific Association for Medical Informatics, is leading work on the development of a travellers' electronic health record. APAMI has also adopted the IMIA Strategic Plan and will be working to contextualize the content to their own specific regional needs, developing an IMIA-APAMI Strategic Plan.

Many other initiatives have begun, aimed at supporting aspects of the IMIA Strategic Plan, and the necessary work to support IMIA's own development and its interaction with other organizations. One key development has been the signing of a joint communique between IMIA and the World Health Organization (WHO) [6], aimed at intensifying collaboration. WHO and IMIA have identified three key areas of joint work for the next three years: the Global Observatory for eHealth, the use of ICT for the development of the health and health care workforce, and sharing eHealth products and services related to intellectual property for development.

Another development is the IMIA Web 2.0 Exploratory Taskforce [7], which will bring together interested individuals from within and outside IMIA to explore the nature and potential of Web 2.0 applications. It aims to develop background materials and propose specific lines of action for the IMIA Board and General Assembly. An online resource of materials describing Web 2.0, Health 2.0, and other relevant memes, and their relevance to IMIA and to health and biomedical informatics is being developed. Other possible outputs include discussion papers and an options appraisal for how IMIA could work on collaborative Web 2.0 projects, and a blueprint for the future devel-

opment of IMIA's electronic services to take account of Web 2.0 and subsequent developments.

Current and Future Processes

In seeking proposals to support the implementation of the IMIA Strategic Plan, we have identified two categories: 1) proposals on a targeted priority area (or areas) that have been identified by the IMIA Board, and 2) unsolicited proposals that address one or more of the projects or issues illustrated in the IMIA Strategic Plan.

The IMIA Board will identify certain priority areas within the strategic plan that IMIA wishes to move forward with as soon as possible. We will seek to either identify people, or existing groups or organizations, or where necessary draw together an IMIA group, to address the issue, or ask a targeted group for a proposal about how they would address the issue. Through a form of "Request for Proposals", which will be available from the IMIA website, IMIA will state what is requested, when it is needed and how much of IMIA's money will be available as a contribution to support the activity.

After IMIA members and other have carefully studied the IMIA Strategic Plan, there may be a group or consortium who might want to address a targeted project or have a project that is important, but not specifically listed in the plan. We will welcome proposals that describe the proposed project, and provide a detailed task/project plan, with expected delivery dates and requested funding, and that describe the group or consortium, its expertise, and their capabilities to complete the project.

The IMIA Board has appointed Dr Peter Murray, currently IMIA Vice President for Working Groups and Special Interest Groups, to the post of Interim Vice President for Strategic Planning Implementation, to co-ordinate this work between now and the 2008 General Assembly meeting, to be held in Goteborg, Sweden, immediately preceding MIE2008. At that meeting, the IMIA General Assembly will be asked to approve the nomination of a new IMIA Vice President with responsibility for this work, and

the initial Transition Plan, together with plans for seeking and evaluating proposals. IMIA members will also have opportunities to engage with the longer-term strategic planning process through new consultation and engagement mechanisms.

Conclusion

The motto for the implementation of the "Towards IMIA 2015" Strategic Plan is "let a thousand flowers bloom!". While this statement may have many meanings to different people within IMIA, the purpose of this motto is to emphasize the goal of encouraging many ideas from many sources. We want to encourage all of our members to work on at least one effort within one of the sectors, resulting in positive deliverables and outputs that can be shared with all. IMIA is, and will as a result increasingly be, the connector organization toward facilitating informatics people creating products or services that will benefit the world and the health of all.

On behalf of the IMIA Board, we encourage all members of the IMIA "family" and all who have an interest in, and contact with, any part of IMIA, to disseminate and examine the IMIA Strategic Plan. We ask you to share the plan with all of your colleagues, and with the groups that you represent, or are members of, in whatever parts of real or virtual worlds that you inhabit (which implies that we may also seek to use "Second Life" and other virtual spaces, as well as other collaborative online areas and applications, for exploring our work).

We would like all groups, and in particular regional groups and Working Groups to consider using the Framework as the basis for developing their own Strategic Plans to meet their own needs (in the same way that APAMI, and IMIA-NI, the Nursing Informatics Special Interest Group, have already done).

Out of this sharing and contextualization, we would like all groups to explore whether there is a specific part of the Strategic Plan, or a specific project, that they can work on for not only their own benefit, but the benefit of the global health and

biomedical informatics communities, both within and outside of IMIA. As the experts in your own particular parts of the wider domain of health and biomedical informatics, you have the knowledge and the skills to help make the vision of the IMIA Strategic Plan a reality, and make IMIA the scientific informatics association that effectively and efficiently connects the people and the nations of the world, and that brings together the world's knowledge leaders to effectively and efficiently create, assemble, integrate, synthesize or assimilate the intellectual knowledge that is required worldwide to advance health and biomedical informatics in its role of improving health and health-care.

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Correspondence to:

Dr. Peter J. Murray
IMIA Interim Vice President for Strategic Planning
Implementation
Coachman's Cottage
Nocton Hall, Nocton
Lincoln
United Kingdom
peterjmurray@gmail.com
www.imia.org

Prof. Dr. Reinhold Haux
President of IMIA
Technical University of Braunschweig
Institute for Medical Informatics
Muehlenpfordtstr. 23
38106 Braunschweig
Germany
r.haux@mi.tu-bs.de
www.imia.org

Prof. Dr. Nancy Lorenzi
Past President of IMIA
Professor of Biomedical Informatics and
Assistant Vice Chancellor for Health Affairs
Vanderbilt University Medical Center
Informatics Center, Eskind Biomedical Library
2209 Garland Avenue
Nashville, TN 37232-8340
USA
nancy.lorenzi@vanderbilt.edu
www.imia.org