

Strategy in a Fishbowl

An Invitation to Determine the Shape of IMIA in 2015

The IMIA Strategic Planning Task Force*

Editorial

Summary

Objectives: The International Medical Informatics Association (IMIA) today is an inclusive organization that represents the medical and health informatics world through its multiple member countries as well as affiliate, corporate and academic institutions, plus working groups and regions. The IMIA leadership deemed this is an excellent time to create a strategic alignment of IMIA's goals and in turn to create a framework of the IMIA agenda for the future.

Methods: The process began in early 2004, with a survey distributed to all IMIA members seeking members' views. The initial views were presented to the IMIA Board and General Assembly at Medinfo 2004 in San Francisco, USA. A Strategic Planning Task Force was established to take forward the development of a Strategic Plan. Through a combination of e-mail exchanges, face-to-face planning-discussion sessions in Geneva, Switzerland, and Washington DC, USA, and use of mediated conference calls, the IMIA Strategic Plan was evolved.

Results: The framework model (also known as the IMIA rainbow umbrella) seeks to represent, in visual and descriptive terms, the numerous possibilities for connections and integration. Knowledge is the central core of IMIA. All of our strategies, interactions and efforts, emanate from this knowledge core. Using a concentric circle model, the next circle (from the central core) represents science. This is followed by the application layer circle, then the impact layer/circle and finally the outermost circle represents the people layer. Another dimensionality of the IMIA Strategic Plan is the need to represent various key sectors. There are six sectors superimposed on the five concentric circle layers of IMIA's integration and connection to others. These sectors represent: health (our vision), research and science, behavioral responsibility, education, relationships and reach.

Conclusion: We are still at a relatively early stage of planning. The Strategic Framework and Plan will be discussed by the IMIA Board and the IMIA General Assembly meeting (November 2006).

Keywords

International Medical Informatics Association, strategic planning

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In the face of complex issues and dilemmas, the ability to navigate through conflicting values and multiple public opinions and professional advice from a variety of players which reflects diverse community interests, all of which are carried out in the "fishbowl" which is the modern public service, requires commitment to the public good, but also patience, courage and stamina [1].

Introduction

In 2007, the International Medical Informatics Association (IMIA) will be 40 years young. We have, as IMIA President Nancy Lorenzi stated in her editorial 'The IMIA Possibility Framework' [2], an illustrious history and many significant achievements – our Medinfo conferences and other events delivered by our regional groups and by our Working Groups and the Nursing Informatics Special Interest Group, the IMIA Yearbook and other respected publications, educational guidelines and a Code of Ethics are just a few. We have a network of national member societies, academic institutions and commercial members, Working Groups and Special

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Interest Groups, all actively involved in developing, exploring and promoting the benefits of informatics for the improvement of health from the individual to the global levels.

However, we have not had a Strategic Plan, or Possibility Framework, within which to explore, plan, and guide our future development. Within this editorial, the members of the IMIA Strategic Planning Task Force describe the work undertaken so far to develop a Vision, Integrated Strategic Framework and Model, and our early work on developing the goals and objectives by which the Strategy can be made reality. Developing a Strategy by committee is a difficult process, and the IMIA Strategic Plan is no different. However, if it is to be owned and accepted by the IMIA 'family', then all its members must be able to assist in its development and agree with the final vision and detail. An open and transparent process of debate and dialogue is needed, to which all members feel they can contribute, and have the opportunity to contribute; the Strategy needs to be placed in the fishbowl for all to inspect it.

The Strategic Plan is still a 'work in progress', but has now reached the stage of development where we need to gain the input from and views of all members of the wider IMIA 'family'. The Framework, as currently developed, is offered to IMIA's members for discussion, and we invite everyone to contribute to the further development of this important work. It will need to be 'owned and accepted' as a Strategy, and will then need the active involvement of the whole community in order to develop and implement the practical work to make it a reality, and to realize the vision we have for IMIA in 2015. There is much work still to be done over the next year in filling in the gaps of the Strategy and beginning to identify specific goals, but we are aiming to have a full Strategy ready to be agreed to and adopted by the IMIA family at IMIA's 40th birthday at Medinfo2007 in Australia.

Where IMIA Has Come from and where It Is now

The International Medical Informatics Association (IMIA) was established in 1967

as Technical Committee 4 of the International Federation for Information Processing (IFIP) under the guidance of François Grémy. In 1979, it evolved from a Special Interest Group of IFIP to its current status as a fully independent organization incorporated under Swiss law. Like other organizations, IMIA has been in large part shaped by the individuals within it. As a volunteer organization, IMIA has been shaped by its presidents in their leadership roles. Those influencing and guiding IMIA include its country representatives, working group members, regional liaisons, corporate and academic members as well as Medinfo attendees. All have left their mark on the organization.

The International Medical Informatics Association (IMIA) today is an inclusive organization that represents the biomedical and health informatics world through 45 full country members as well as 28 countries whose informatics associations are evolving, four affiliate members, nine corporate members, 46 academic institutions, and four regions of the world. Our numbers include 140 significant entities across the world. Through IMIA members, we have both outstanding knowledge and the connections throughout the world to make a substantial contribution to address the most significant informatics issues that are facing our healthcare systems.

Information technology has been changing the world and will keep doing so for as far as anyone can see. Health and healthcare are among the most complex fields of knowledge and as such are among the most likely areas to be transformed by the use of informatics concepts and tools. The relevance of health informatics is very likely to increase in the years ahead as it has increasingly become a tool for better understanding biological processes, better distributing healthcare services and providing better education to health professionals.

It is our belief that IMIA has a major role to play in leading the way to a responsible and productive use of health informatics. For IMIA to play this role, we must advance one step further and plan our action for the years to come, directing our efforts to reach goals that materialize our vision. Also, like other organizations it is important from time

to time to make plans for its future. With the continued evolution of informatics, IMIA is now seeing another generation of professionals join its numbers. Through the years, IMIA has grown and changed. Today the Board and the membership are taking new measures to ensure that IMIA continues to be a vital organization representing health informatics worldwide.

Since we are so large and since we are at the beginning of a new century, this is an excellent time to look at a strategic alignment of IMIA's goals and in turn to create a framework of the IMIA agenda for the future. In 2004, IMIA President, Nancy Lorenzi appointed a Strategic Planning Task Force to facilitate the development of an IMIA strategic plan.

Approach, Process and Evolution of the IMIA Strategic Plan

Beginning a strategic planning process is a potentially overwhelming task. The complexity of a global association such as IMIA, functioning as it does in the hyper evolution and change state of modern health informatics is enormous, but the need for a Strategic Plan was seen as paramount by the IMIA leadership.

The process began in early 2004, with a survey distributed to all IMIA countries, IMIA Special Interest and Working Groups, current and past leadership, the Senior Officers Group, and all corporate and academic members. With a then target date of 2010 in mind, the survey sought members' views of how IMIA would look and what it would be doing in 2010, its strengths and the benefits of membership, and how it had changed since 2004. The survey responses pointed toward a focus on IMIA being the integrating, connecting, and networking organization for health-related informatics efforts around the world – whether clinical, biological or organizational. The visions submitted indicated that at this time in world history, most countries were actively looking at their healthcare systems and that IMIA was the only organization that could

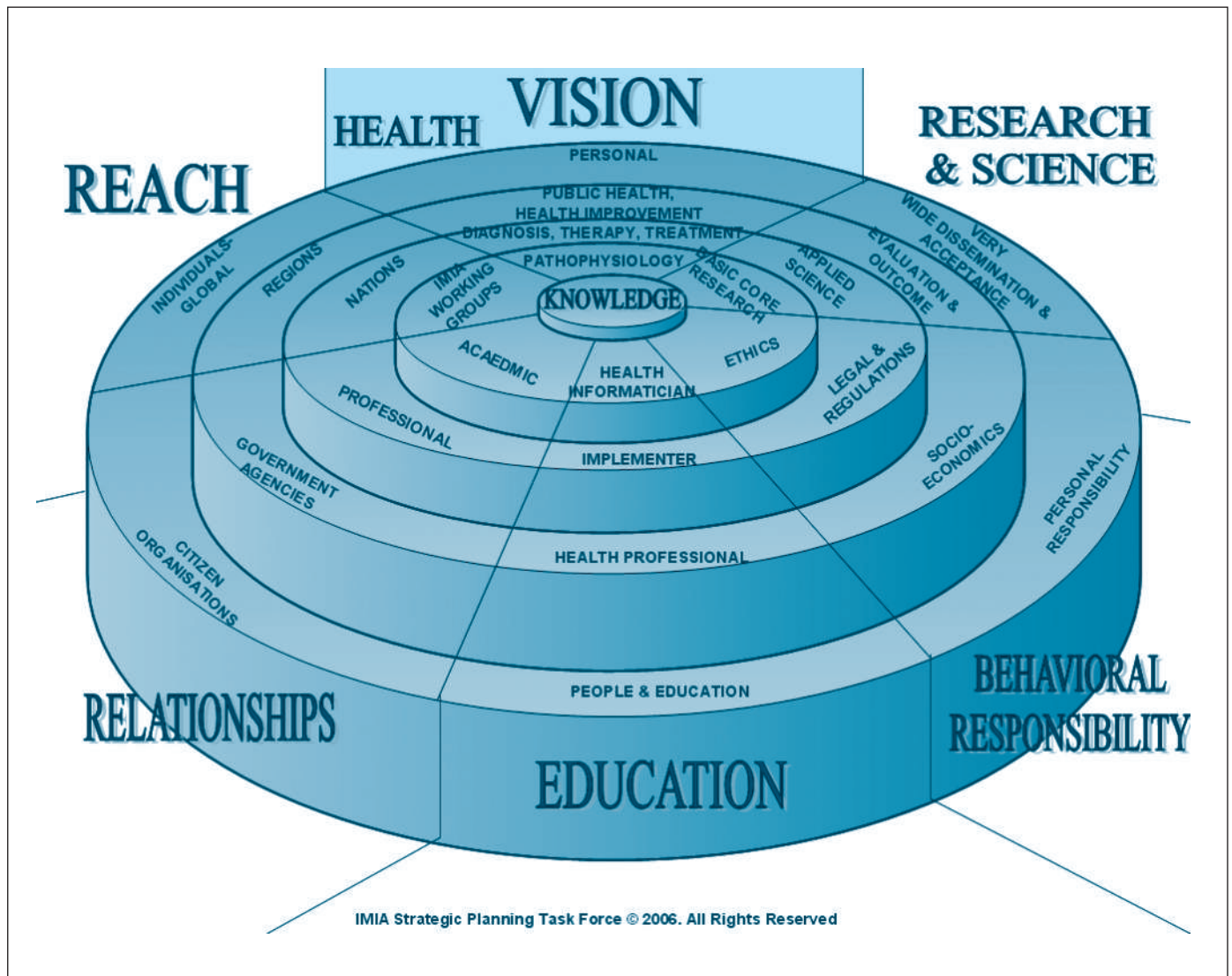


Fig. 1 The IMIA Integrated Strategic Planning Framework

provide informatics professionals with the needed connections to support their various countries efforts. The vision foresaw IMIA's integrating-connecting-networking being supported by a sophisticated electronic infrastructure that connects experts worldwide with those who have a need to know, whether individuals, organizations or countries.

These initial views were presented to the IMIA Board and General Assembly at Medinfo2004 in San Francisco, USA, and a Strategic Planning Task Force established to take forward the development of a Strategic Plan. Through a combination of e-mail exchanges, face-to-face planning-dis-

cussion sessions in Geneva, Switzerland, and Washington DC, USA, and use of VoIP-mediated conference calls, the IMIA Strategic Plan was evolved to its current state.

Where We Are so far – the Vision, the Framework Model, the Principles

The IMIA Strategic Plan currently comprises a vision for IMIA, a set of guiding principles, and an Integrated Strategic

Framework Model. The model, which is summarized in Figure 1, provides a multi-dimensional representation of the scope of IMIA's areas of legitimate interest and activity, connections and integration possibilities. It is not possible here to provide the full detail of the framework model, especially the detailed description of the components; the current version can be downloaded for study and comment from the IMIA web-site.

The vision for IMIA sees its role as one of providing leadership and expertise in health informatics to the multidisciplinary health-focused community and policy makers in order to enable the transformation

of healthcare in accord with the worldwide vision to improve the health of the world population. To achieve this future vision for the 21st century healthcare and research it will require everyone being supported by information systems.

IMIA will fulfill its vision by:

- being the informatics association through which the world's knowledge leaders come together to effectively and efficiently create, assemble, integrate, synthesize or assimilate intellectual knowledge that is required worldwide to advance biomedical/health informatics in its role of improving health and health-care;
- being the informatics association that effectively and efficiently connects people and the nations of the world to be able to accomplish the above purpose.

A set of guiding principles underpins the strategic framework, these being that:

- 1) IMIA will help to ensure a holistic, systems approach to collaboration and networking about health informatics to maximize its impact worldwide.
- 2) IMIA will uphold an ethical approach to informatics systems as identified by IMIA's seven ethical principles.
- 3) IMIA will promote health informatics based on evidence and best practice to ensure impact on health is high quality, safe, efficient and sustainable and that makes it easy to do the right thing, in the right way, at the right time worldwide.

The framework model seeks to represent, in visual and descriptive terms, the numerous possibilities for connections and integration. From these arise a possible future structure for IMIA and its work to evolve. This multidimensional model comprises five concentric circle layers and six sectors to the overall circle. Each circle and each sector describes a component of IMIA.

Knowledge is the central core of IMIA, thus in the center of the model is the knowledge core. All of our strategies, interactions and efforts, emanate from this knowledge core. The second circle (from the central core) that directly touches the knowledge core represents the science layer. It is within

this layer that IMIA members have their connection and integration with the science and discovery of informatics. The third circle represents the application layer of the scientific discoveries. It is within this circle that applications that address the multiple questions and issues in informatics are created and disseminated. The fourth circle represents IMIA's impact layer. This refers to the potential impact that IMIA and its members can have on governments, nations, outcomes, health professionals, etc. The fifth, and outermost, circle represents the people layer. Items in this circle include individuals, citizen organizations, personal health involvement, dissemination and acceptance, enabling personal responsibility, and public/personal health.

Another dimensionality of the Strategic Plan is the need to represent 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 further 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 our vision is to improve health this sector represents our vision and thus our strategic goals support this sector. This sector contains pathophysiology (in the science layer); diagnosis, therapy, treatment (in the application layer); public health and health improvement (in the impact layer) and personal health (in the people layer).

The next section is research/science (evidence) (how we understand and create to support health). Within this section we have the following: basic core research (within the science layer); applied science (within the application layer); evaluation (usability) and outcomes (within the impact layer); and dissemination and acceptance (within the people layer). This is followed by the behavioral responsibility (ethics) sector that refers to our ethical and social responsibility. Within this sector we see the following layers: ethics (within the science layer); legal/regulation (within the application layer); socio-economic (within the impact layer); and personal responsibility (within the people layer). The next sector is education (best practices) (educating ourselves and others). Within this layer we have the

following: health informaticians (within the science layer); implementers (within the application layer); health professionals (within the impact layer); and people education (within the people layer). The next sector represents the multiple types of relationships (communications and connections) (our responsibility to build relationships among stakeholders). Within this sector are the following layers: academic (within the science layer); professional (within the application layer); governments/agencies (within the impact layer); and citizen organizations (within the people layer). The sixth sector is the reach (equity) of IMIA (our obligation to share, distribute and disseminate). The layers within this sector are as follows: global (within the science layer); regions (within the application layer); nations (within the impact layer); and individuals (within the people layer).

Towards Agreeing and Owning the Strategic Plan

There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things [3].

Despite all the work undertaken by the IMIA Strategic Planning Task Force, and all the IMIA members with whom we have discussed our ideas, and who have contributed their views so willingly and enthusiastically, we are still at a relatively early stage. The Strategic Framework and Plan will be discussed by the IMIA Board at the June 2006 meeting and will culminate in a major discussion at the 2006 General Assembly meeting. If the General Assembly membership of IMIA, its governing body, agrees to the overall strategic direction, there will still be a great deal of work in completing the detail of the specific objectives and tasks to be undertaken in realizing the strategic vision. We are aiming to have a full strategy ready to be agreed and adopted by the IMIA family at IMIA's 40th birthday at Medinfo2007 in Australia.

“You must be the change you want to see in the world.” (Mahatma Gandhi)

Of course, a Strategic Plan, to be meaningful, needs to be a living document, allowing us to creatively evolve as an organization, and not one cast in stone that constrains us. Our vision of IMIA in 2015 and beyond will continue to grow and evolve, as IMIA grows and evolves to meet the needs of its membership and the wider health and biomedical informatics community – and contribute to the health of people worldwide. We invite

you all to join in this work, and to share with us in achieving the real possibilities that this vision offers.

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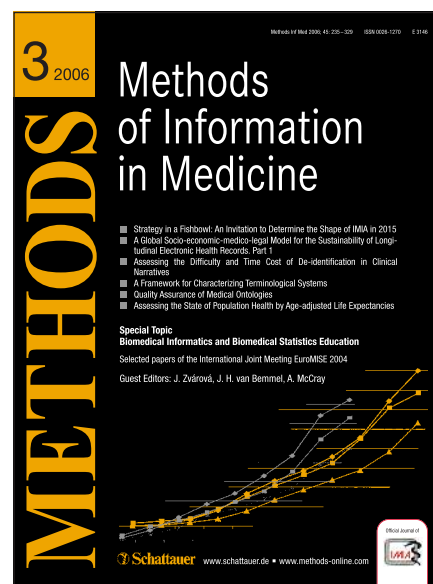
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Methods of Information in Medicine with new cover design

To our Readers

Dear readers, with this issue, we have decided to give *Methods of Information in Medicine* a new look. We hope that you are just as pleased with the new cover as we are and welcome any comments you might have.

With this cover relaunch we further emphasize our maxim „Good medicine and good health care demand good information“!



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