IMIA Biosurveillance Task Force Initiated

There is a considerable amount of effort now underway across the world to standardize and coordinate biosurveillance for public health reporting infrastructure. A significant driver for the attention is the very real probability of an influenza H5N1 pandemic, in addition to other emerging infectious diseases. While many efforts include the evaluation of existing terminology, information interchange and security standards[a, b], open source options have potential to serve as a world-wide infrastructure to support bio-surveillance[c]. By definition, a pandemic would not stop at national borders and international efforts are important to coordinate with well established global, national and regional public health organizations such as the World Health Organization, the US Center for Disease Control and Prevention, the European Center for Disease Control and Prevention, and others.

In keeping with proposed IMIA Strategic Planning, Nancy Lorenzi, IMIA President has authorized a task force comprised of Working Group chairs to evaluate such collaborative efforts for biosurveillance. Two specific activities will comprise the initial activities of the task force. First, the group will develop a concept paper regarding the creation of a world-wide open-source informatics infrastructure for timely, effective and efficient data gathering processes for event identification, event monitoring, notification and response. There is potential for impact on management of all healthcare processes and delivery by defining surveillance broadly, includes monitoring, notification and response of all operational processes and clinical data to enhance health and performance improvement. The strategy is to enable surveillance to be performed locally, within a healthcare organization, regionally, nationally, or internationally. A second task is to evaluate requirements and encourage an open source sharing mechanism for genomic identification of bacterial and viral pathogens, similar to mechanisms currently in progress for human genomic and proteomic research. The issue is one of significant import due to the ongoing development of emerging infectious diseases, some of which mutate rapidly (e.g., influenza).

The Task Force will be chaired by Floyd Eisenberg, MD, MPH, currently serving on the IMIA General Assembly as representative of Siemens Medical Solutions, who also serves on the IMIA Strategic Planning Committee. Other members include leadership from eight IMIA Working Groups as follows:

- Open Source Health Informatics – Dr. **Peter J. Murray**, PhD, RN, CertEd, FBCS CITP – Lincoln, Lincolnshire, UK
- Informatics in Genomic Medicine (IGM) – Dr. **Fernando J. Martin-Sanchez**, PhD – Madrid, Spain
- Intelligent Data Analysis and Data Mining (WG 03) – Dr. **Riccardo Bellazzi**, PhD, Prof. – Pavia, Italy
- Security in Health Information Systems (WG 04) – Dr. **Jochen R. Moehr**, MD, PhD – Victoria, BC, Canada
- Primary Health Care Informatics (WG 05) – **Sheila Teasdale –** University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK
- Health Informatics for Development (WG 09) – Prof. Dr. **George I. Mihalas**, PhD – Timisoara, Romania
- Health Information Systems (WG 10) – Prof. Dr. **Klaus Kuhn –** Munich University of Technology, Munich, Germany
- Standards in Health Care Informatics (WG 16) – Prof. **Michio Kimura –** MD, PhD – Hamamatsu University, Hamamatsu, Japan

The Biosurveillance Task Force represents a unique cross section of IMIA Working Group chairs to address a truly global issue. The product of this effort will hopefully have significant impact on the ability of nations and/or globally and nationally-focused health organizations to prevent and manage disease risks. Initial review of the efforts of the Biosurveillance Task Force will be presented at the IMIA General Assembly Meeting in Washington DC in November 2006.

Contact address for IMIA:
Huesing, Mr. Steven A.
Executive Director IMIA
5782 – 172 Street
Edmonton, Canada T6M 1B4
Tel.: +1 780 489 4531
Fax: +1 780 489 3290
E-mail: imia@shaw.ca
http://www.imia.org

[a] Aramini J, Edge V, McDonald L, et al. Real-Time Biosurveillance and Response Readiness Using an Interconnected, Electronic Information Infrastructure: A Region-Wide Technology Demonstration Project at the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority. Nov 9, 2005. Available at: http://www.crti.drdc-rddc.gc.ca/en/investments/technology_demonstration/03_0019td.asp. Accessed April 21, 2006 .

[b] US Department of Health and Human Services. American Health Information Community Workgroups: Biosurveillance Workgroup. Apr 5, 2006. Available at: http://www.hhs.gov/healthit/ahic/bio_main.html. Accessed April 21, 2006 .

[c] University of Pittsburgh. The RODS Open Source Project: Open Source Outbreak and Disease Surveillance Software. 2003. http://openrods.sourceforge.net/index.php?page=publications. Accessed April 21, 2006 .