

January 7, 2009

Office of President Elect Barack Obama  
451 6th Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Mr. President-Elect,

On behalf of the more than 4,000 physicians, nurses and other members of the American Medical Informatics Association (AMIA) who use health information and communications technology (HIT) to improve the quality, efficiency and safety of healthcare, I am writing to applaud and encourage your commitment to investing in a genuine transformation of our nation's healthcare system. Properly deployed and supported, HIT can be part of broad health care reform and, importantly in this time of economic challenge, a significant economic multiplier that will encourage the creation of new jobs and real improvements in patient care, public health and life sciences research.

AMIA is greatly heartened by your recent comment, "To save not only jobs, but money and lives, we will update and computerize our health care system to cut red tape, prevent medical mistakes and help reduce health care costs by billions of dollars each year." Certainly, HIT is key to improving health care – but health informatics is more than merely hardware and software, it is the application of information science to manage change so that HIT systems actually get implemented successfully. It also involves knowing how to capture, process, use, reuse, and interpret health data. And, perhaps most importantly, it involves design and redesign of workflow processes, informatics education and research, general professional personnel training, and understanding of organizational culture in order to advance healthcare delivery and quality. As your Administration commits to developing a national infrastructure for HIT and informatics and rapid expansion of a trained workforce that can effectively use health information and communication technology tools, America will have an unparalleled opportunity to address the health and healthcare needs of all of our citizens.

If we are to develop a national infrastructure for the use of health information to benefit individuals and our entire population, the United States must –

- Develop mechanisms, including grants, loans and financial incentives for physicians, nurses, and healthcare organizations to deploy, implement successfully, and widely disseminate electronic health records (EHRs);

- Develop and support local, regional and national health information exchange to ensure that accurate, secure health information is available whenever and wherever needed by those authorized to access such information;
- Develop and support programs to address the need for a prepared health information technology workforce, with training and continuing education of physicians, nurses, health information managers and others;
- Develop more effective ways to address the health needs of underserved populations, including providing equitable access to health information and communications technology;
- Develop and assure compliance with standards, policies and practices that support effective sharing of health information, while fostering security, confidentiality and transparency, and building trust with the public;
- Develop and maintain health terminologies and classifications that will allow health data to be not only useful, but uniform and consistent, and enable interoperability across myriad information systems;
- Develop proper means to link information related to individuals in order to ensure the validity and integrity of health data used to inform care and research;
- Develop proper means for authentication of the identity of individuals and caregivers and any others authorized to access identifiable health information;
- Support the development of decision-making and other knowledge-management tools in order to permit the delivery of individualized, evidence-based care;
- Develop and support secure web-portals to link individuals to their caregivers and ensure genuinely patient-centered care;
- Develop appropriate and secure linkages between EHRs and the public health system to ensure safety from bioterrorism, rapidly spreading infectious diseases, and other threats;
- And provide appropriate funding for the development of a robust national health information strategy, with support for continued HIT and informatics research and innovation.

During the Presidential campaign, you demonstrated your boldness and vision by pledging to allocate \$10 billion annually for five years to promote the adoption and use of health IT. Such an investment will pay dividends not only in improving health care, but in creating jobs; indeed, research conducted by the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation indicates that spending \$10 billion on electronic health records and health-related IT projects will create over 200,000 new jobs.

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Mr. President-elect, a sound health information and communications technology infrastructure and a well-trained HIT workforce is vital to resolving many of the challenges that stand in the way of an efficient, patient-centered, quality-driven healthcare system. It would be tragic if a major investment in health hardware and software is made without assuring that there are sufficient numbers of clinicians and information managers who are knowledgeable about informatics and information science and can assure that HIT actually delivers on its promise. While progress has been made by way of a number of public-private collaborations, only strong and decisive Federal leadership can help us improve health care access, quality and cost with all due haste. AMIA will fully support you and your Administration in the pursuit of those goals, and we stand ready to educate the health workforce in how to assure that EHRs meet their promise. Representing a membership that developed EHRs and currently improves HIT innovations and also applies health informatics solutions to meet patient needs every day, please do not hesitate to contact me at any time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Don Eugene Detmer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Don Detmer, MD, MA  
President and CEO  
American Medical Informatics Association