

American Medical Informatics Association

Proposal for Discussion on Core Competencies and Certification in Medical Informatics

Organized by AMIA's Education Committee

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Background

As the field of medical informatics grows, it appears critical that we consider what it means to be an informatician, practicing in a variety of professional venues, be they academic or professional medicine, nursing, dentistry, veterinary medicine, or allied health professions. At its meeting at the 2001 Annual Fall Symposium, the Education Committee discussed the need for exploring the description of "core competencies," that would help define the educational goals of informatics training programs and provide a set of expectations that could be applied to individuals working in the field and used by management in defining roles for these individuals. At the Symposium, the Education Committee unanimously endorsed a resolution that there be an initiative to define these competencies, and to organize an intensive working meeting directed toward that effort. It was envisioned that this meeting would involve several members of the Education Committee as well as additional representatives from within AMIA. On a conference call in March, 2002 the Education Committee expanded its resolution to include the consideration of creating, within AMIA, a certification program for the field of medical informatics, discussed in detail below.

Meanwhile in February, 2002, the American College of Medical Informatics (ACMI) focused its annual Symposium on analyzing existing National Library of Medicine (NLM)-funded informatics training programs with respect to bioinformatics, and particularly the BSTI programs. At that time, a conversation was held between the Education Committee Chair and Charles Friedman, who is heading up the ACMI effort. It was determined that the two initiatives were complementary, rather than duplicative or competing, and that the inclusion of Dr. Friedman and at least one other member of the ACMI effort participate in the Education Committee's core competencies initiative to facilitate that complementarity.

Core Competencies

The Issue of Certification

On its March conference call, members of the Education Committee felt that there might be some immediacy to examining the issue of certification in informatics. The launching of two other recent certification programs have the long-range potential to co-opt professional competency issues specifically related to informatics if such an effort is not at least considered within the core informatics community. These include a certification program offered by HIMSS – the Certified Professional in Healthcare Information and Management Systems (CPHIMS) – and a new certification program in patient privacy and data security offered by jointly by HIMSS and AHIMA. The existence of these programs as the only known (and heavily advertised) avenues to certification in health information systems could lead to the perception that they are equivalent to certification in health informatics. Second, as these programs become better known, there is a very real possibility that the certifications they offer may be requested, or even required, by healthcare management. The conclusion could be reached that the field of medical informatics, and AMIA as its leading professional organization, has little to offer with regard to professional recognition, when compared to HIMSS or AHIMA.

While the issue of certification does not affect everyone who consider themselves to be working in medical informatics, nor the entirety of AMIA's membership, a substantial number of people in this field and members of its core professional association do work in healthcare information management positions. Even within the more academic component of the field, health sciences faculty at many institutions are expected to carry some type of clinical load. In some cases, this load is not so much direct patient care, but care-related administrative duties, such as clinical information systems administration. It is possible that, in those situations, AMIA members would see certification as a benefit, or more probably, that their institutions would see it thusly and increasingly require certification for these individuals.

Organization of a November, 2002 Meeting and Follow-Up

The Education Committee proposes to hold a special meeting to define core competencies in medical informatics, as well as to develop a position on the issue of certification in medical informatics. This charge to the Education Committee has been approved by the AMIA Board of Directors. Meeting participants will include a sub-group of the Education Committee, at two least individuals closely involved in the ACMI effort, and several additional other AMIA members identified by the Education Committee whose participation will be designed to ensure a broad representation of sub-specialties within the field of medical informatics.

The meeting will take place on November 13-15, 2002, in San Antonio, Texas, immediately following AMIA's Annual Symposium, starting on Wednesday afternoon, November 13, and finishing Friday morning, November 15. The meeting will be agenda

will be organized by the Education Committee. An experienced facilitator will be hired to facilitate the meeting.

The deliverable from this effort will be a white paper describing the concept of core competencies, and by extension, certification; who would be affected and how; **[and]** analyzing how this might affect the direction of the profession in general and the role and mechanisms that AMIA as a professional association should take; **[and making specific recommendations as to the core competencies that should be covered in the curriculum of formal medical informatics programs and others that teach medical informatics]**. The substantive content for the white paper will be generated at the San Antonio meeting. The drafting and refinement of the white paper itself will take place during November and December under the direction of the Education Committee Chair and involving assistance from others and input and comment from all those who participated in the retreat.

Note: The budget section originally included in this document has been removed for mounting on the AMIA website.