

American Medical Informatics Association Nursing Informatics History project

Purpose

The overall purpose of the Nursing Informatics History Project is to document and preserve the history of nursing informatics.

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Joyce Sensmeier

Joyce Sensmeier: Joyce Sensmeier, Vice President of Informatics at HIMSS, Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society.

Interviewer: And the letters?

Joyce Sensmeier: Sure. MS, masters of science, RN, Board Certified in Nursing Informatics. And my other credential is CP HIMSS, Certified Profession in Health Information Management Systems from our organization.

Interviewer: And you're a fellow at HIMSS?

Joyce Sensmeier: I am a fellow at HIMSS. Yes, recently achieved a fellowship at HIMSS.

Interviewer: How would you describe nursing informatics?

Joyce Sensmeier: I think it's a, a specialty that... and it's... nursing...

Nursing informatics is a specialty that is really not just the studying of how nurses enable information to be used within systems, but how nurses can apply all of their knowledge to that, helping to design systems, implement systems, do research around information technology—the process of helping to make that happen, to me, is the specialty of nursing informatics.

One of the things that I think I've begun to learn at least more recently is that it's really an infrastructure layer for nursing. It hits all of the nursing specialties, even though it is its own unique specialty, which I am thrilled to be a part of, and thrilled to know that that's acknowledged. But I think it has implications for all of the other specialties within nursing.

Interviewer: You've been a leader for a number of years. Can you tell us more about MANI, and how you got involved...?

Joyce Sensmeier: As a staff nurse, I applied for a position in nursing education at our community hospital. And one of the roles of that nurse was to be involved with education around computers systems. So on the interview process, they said to me, 'Do you know how to use a computer?' And I said, 'Well, we have a computer at home.' And they said, 'Great. You're hired. You're going to do all the training for our 350-bed hospital.' So that was definitely a challenge at that point in time for me. Little did they know that in order to get into the computer, I typically had to call somebody to learn the process. But the systems at that time were fairly basic, mainframe systems with light pens, and so you could... if you had common sense, you could pretty well maneuver through that. But what that opened up for me was a whole new world that I wasn't even aware of. And at the hospital, our implementation went very, very painfully. As a nurse, I think we bring communication skills to each role that we have. We know the nursing process, so we can apply that. So it was really just applying skills in a new different way for me.

A wonderful thing that happened, about that same time in the mid-80's... well, actually, more towards the late 80's, was the Midwest Alliance Centers in Informatics. And that group is...was a networking group for nurses like myself. We weren't close to programmers where we could learn about what it was that we were doing. We were all figuring out... it out together. So to find that community that was kindred spirits, other folks doing the same things that we were, was just very exciting.

And so MANI grew very rapidly over the years. I was very happy to be a part of that growth. And was president somewhere in the 90's, and able to really bring education to, to my colleagues in the area. It was the Chicago-land area, but we brought members from throughout the country at times, those that could travel. It mostly was regional-focused, and opportunity for networking and learning from each other.

Interviewer: You were responsible for bringing the WINI to the Midwest.

Joyce Sensmeier: The Midwest Alliance for Nursing Informatics was not the only regional group, as you know very well. There were others that were popping up for the same purpose. And we

created a virtual community and connected with each other via e-mail. And I had a nice opportunity through that to connect with other experts throughout the country, and Susan Newbold was one of those. And we were aware of the WINI program that was being held pretty much on the East Coast. And we were very interested in having that type of event for our members in the Chicago-land area. So via e-mail Susan and I exchanged, some...had some dialogue, and we were very fortunate to have the WINI come to Chicago. And I think that launched their, their movement to be a more of a, a national effort, rather than just a regional effort, which was, was great for us.

Interviewer: Who were some of the other people that influenced your career?

Joyce Sensmeier: My career has been influenced certainly by those that have written in the literature. Because I didn't go to a formal program in nursing informatics, I would pick up and read...books that others had written. So some of the greats—certainly, Virginia Saba, Kathleen McCormick—they influenced by thinking and understanding of, of the work.

I was involved with the revision of *The Scope and Standards of Nursing Informatics*, and through that I became much more connected with some of the experts, like Nancy Staggers, Carol Bickford, and was influenced by them.

I think the, the strongest influence for me, personally, though, was really Ida Androwich. She was a professor at Loyola University, and she encouraged me to get involved with the educational program there, and I was able to be an instructor there with her. But she was probably my strongest mentor, helping me to understand that nursing informatics went beyond the community hospital, that there was a whole national effort around it, that there were nurses internationally involved with it, helping me to understand the terminology pieces. And she's been a wonderful guide and influence to me.

Interviewer: What are the scope and standards?

Joyce Sensmeier: Sure. The original one, which was published by the ANA probably in the early 90's, maybe '92, or so, that was a defining moment, I think, for our specialty, because so many

of us had been involved with it for a while. I mean, some people go way back into the 70's for nursing informatics before I... well, I was still cutting my teeth in nursing. But that document really described who, who we were, in terms of our role, and how we were... what we were to be working on. And before that, we were just doing things that we enjoyed doing, and working hard, and making some inroads, influencing systems, getting them to be more user-friendly for nurses, but we really didn't have a name for ourselves that was official sanctioned, I guess you could say. So to me *The Scope and Standards* was extremely important.

Then it was also great to see the certification program begin, so that nurses could become credentialed in our specialty, and that really kind of put the, the ribbon on us, in the sense that we were accepted, and, and it was an official way of doing nursing.

Interviewer: Do you see anything else as something significant that has helped shape the field of nursing informatics?

Joyce Sensmeier: To me, the shaping of the field of nursing informatics has been more subtle than individual events. There have been conferences, like AMIA has done wonderful education around the topic, HIMSS has also done programs, and more recently for nursing informatics the regional groups as well. To me, it's been more of a ground swell that's kind of grown over time, as we reach out to each other, as we begin to expand our roles into consulting, design, educational research, and now, certainly, into the world of policy we're beginning to have more of an influence. So I can't think of a... defining moment for the specialty, but I just think it... is a natural progression, which his wonderful.

More recently, I would say having nurses in roles that, really, with our government, with the Veterans Affairs, and, and the military have helped the, the government agencies to understand. And certainly now our, our president and others are getting on the bandwagon, not specifically for nursing informatics, but for the whole health care

information technology push, and the understanding of how important that is, being able to share electronic health records.

So it's an amazing time now for nursing, and the history of where we come from has really helped to build what we can do today to respond to that, the experts that we have.

Interviewer: Does HIMSS have a role in influencing policy?

Joyce Sensmeier: When I first came to HIMSS five years ago, one of the first jobs that I had there was advocacy. And when I was reading the job description, I was trying to figure out what that advocacy thing was. I mean, patient advocacy, of course. By they were really applying it to our national agenda, and more of advocating for policy, public policy. So one of the first things that I was asked to do was to go and testify to the FDA about bar coding. Well, I've not implementing bar coding, but many of my colleagues have. I had not testified before the FDA before, but, you know, in nursing informatics this is our world. We are asked to do things we've never had to do before, and figure it out, and making it happen. So here we go to the FDA.

What I found through that opportunity is that nurses are so credible. Just presenting to that panel—all I did was tell a story of a medical error that I had seen in my experiencing in nursing, and what bar coding could do to help prevent that. And when I was speaking, it was completely silent, even the people in the audience who were listening. And it's not because I'm that eloquent; it's just that the story was a pure story. And I think each of us as informaticists have had that background, and we bring that to our role. We're advocating for patients truly in everything that we do, but it is an opportunity to influence a national agenda with that.

Interviewer: You're currently co-chaired for Alliance for Nursing Informatics. What is the Alliance for Nursing Informatics?

Joyce Sensmeier: One of the things that I think will be a nice opportunity for nursing informatics moving forward is the collaboration that we're starting to see. I think many of us were involved

with our regional groups through our environments where we were doing our job, and not always having opportunities to connect to work together. One of the things that has happened in this past year is the forming of the Alliance for Nursing Informatics. And what that group in collaboration is doing is putting together all of the regional groups and the activities that have been moving forward thus far into a cohesive whole. So the idea of the alliance is that we would be able to have a united voice together to say, 'What is it that we need and help represent nursing in the national agenda in another forum for us?'

So one of the drivers for that was last year there was a national summit that was convened by the Department of Health and Human Services, looking at how can we get an electronic health record implemented in the next decade? And there were very few nurses on the panel, on the dais. And it was so striking to me that we have to work together to help make this happen. We need to put aside our personal and organizational agendas, and really create a collaborative environment and climate and work together. And it's so exciting to see 20 groups now, including AMIA and HIMSS and the nursing informatics communities within those organizations, as well as the regional groups, and with international connections, coming together, to work together to help make that happen. And we have now a website, and we're beginning to create some opportunities to move that agenda forward. So I think the next 10 years will give us some very interesting history for nursing informatics based on that work.

Interviewer: Do you have an a-ha moment when you realized the value of informatics in the health care arena?

Joyce Sensmeier: I think my a-ha moment for the value of informatics was working as a nurse in a hospital, and having just implemented a medication record that was electronic, and having all of the nurses kind of saying, 'Oh, we really don't want this to happen. We think this is going to be very frightening. We're afraid that our...we're going to be making more errors.' And a week after that was implemented they were coming to me, saying, 'What are we going to be doing next?'

So it's like when you see the nurses get engaged and involved, and know that you're making a difference in influencing that, that to me is the a-ha moment of not only what nursing informatics can do, but what you can do to help influence the processing of specialty.

Interviewer: When did you first consider yourself an informatics nurse?

Joyce Sensmeier: I think when I passed the certification exam... Before that I was like, 'I think I know how to do this...'

Joyce Sensmeier: I first considered myself an informatics nurse after I passed that nursing informatics credentialing exam. Before that I thought I was going it, I thought I understood, but, you know, it's really nice to have that quantified, and to get that seal of approval. So when I had those credentials behind my name, I really felt like, 'Okay, I've made that, and I've, I've set the bar for myself, you know, and now I can move forward in it and go from that.'

Interviewer: What are your personal aspirations?

Joyce Sensmeier: The vision that's guides my, my work and the, the clear path that I've been moving forward on is that we can actually be able to access all of the information that we need for patients wherever we are, regardless of setting, regardless of moment in time. It's a...that's a very aggressive goal to have, but if we're going to get there, to me, informatics, informaticists are going to help us achieve that.

Also, I would say a parallel goal for me is to have my colleagues and our organizations working together towards that goal. The biggest challenge that I think we've had in the past and... are some of the barriers that we've set up that are artificial barriers. There's really no reason why the groups can't work together to make this happen. And I'm pleased today to see that we have put some that aside, and we're beginning to have more of a collaboration to help make that happen. It's not easy to accomplish those goals, and we're not going to be able to do it as silos. So together, I think it's achievable.

Interviewer: What were some of the earliest people or events that influenced your early career?

Joyce Sensmeier: Some of the earlier events were... would have been AMIA meetings, probably... I wasn't involved with the SCAMC meetings, but I know that that's where some of the nurses were cutting their teeth in nursing informatics. So that was a little bit before my entry into the field. But I can remember some AMIA meetings, certainly the MANI meetings as well. More... I guess what was happening through e-mail, through the listservs, hearing the themes that were coming, coming out, and what others were struggling similar to myself, how they were solving their problems, or, or asking others to help with solving problems. So it was more of a virtual connection, I guess, rather than specific events. As a nurse working in a community hospital, I really didn't have the funding to get to those bigger events, but it was great to see the literature coming out, more and more of it, and getting involved with that. So that would probably be my perspective.

Interviewer: Talk about the evolution of nursing informatics. Where do you see it on a scale of immature to a mature field?

Joyce Sensmeier: Nursing informatics... well, I guess we probably have been around for a couple of decades, yet I still think we're at, at a beginning point of an explosion within our specialty. What we're doing now is collaborating a lot more across specialties. So, many of the nurses that are implementing systems are doing that for respiratory therapists, for social work, for really the charting and documentation pieces. So we're collaborating more with our colleagues beyond nursing.

I think where we're headed to is being leadings in helping to get that electronic health record implemented. So, as a specialty, we have a, a very exciting role to play in that. We are collaborating with physicians, certainly with CPOE efforts. But I do think they even look to us as leaders. Maybe they don't admit that, but we are so organized, we're so process-oriented, and we're so collegial that it's just... it's not a single person making things happen; it's a group of people. And I think that's strong influence. And so to me

it's, it's helping those specialties to move forward and really being leaders to get a national agenda and the international agendas accomplished.

Interviewer: What do you tell to a new nurse who wants to get into nursing informatics?

Joyce Sensmeier: When someone is asking me about getting into the specialty, I am, first of all, very excited, because I know, you know what they're in for. It's quite a ride. So I would typically tell them reach out to your peers. We have wonderful networking groups within nursing, so talk to others. Learn as much as you possibly can, but be ready for hard work, but exciting times. And you... a really key thing is to be... to be ready to, to respond quickly, to be creative about what you do, and to be ready to apply new and exciting things, because you're not going to be able to go to a single book to learn how to do this job.

So I'm always excited to see new people come into the field, because we need so many more of us to do... to accomplish the, the work that's ahead of us. And also for them to know that they're going to be part of a newer specialty and influencing a lot of... a lot of health... where health care needs to be.

Interviewer: Where do you think the field of nursing or health care informatics is going?

Joyce Sensmeier: The field of health care informatics is trying to respond to multiple drivers right now. One of them is Dr. Brailer in the Office of the National Coordinator, has set out an aggressive agenda for accomplishment over the... over the coming years. So, nursing informatics seems to be very much a part of the answer to that question.

I think, also, there is... there's the whole pay-for-performance activity that's going on that nurses are going to meet to help lay the groundwork for, get the data in shape so that it can be captured and you can see outcomes from that. So, there's a financial influence that's going on, a national agenda influence.

The other thing that is happening is our world is getting smaller. So nurses that are in consulting are consulting all over the world, so we really have to learn about what is different about that. Many of us are grounded in our own national efforts, and I certainly am a victim of that myself. But my organization is becoming more international, and other organizations are as well. So we need to reach out to our nursing peers around the world, collectively gather our knowledge and respond to the challenge ahead.

Interviewer: Do you have anything to say about the limitations of the field for nursing?

Joyce Sensmeier: I think the limitations for nursing practice have... part of it has been a gender bias, I guess, in a sense. So, many of us are female. We aren't aggressive, typically, in going... in moving our own agenda forward. We're ready to, to work hard and make a difference, but a lot of times we're waiting to be asked that question. And... so I think a limitation is really from our own natural instincts. It's wonderful to see more men get involved with the specialty, it's wonderful to see more opportunities being offered, and nurses stepping up to those challenges. But I think... I think in some ways, we have been our own worst enemy in not demanding that we have access to the information we need, demanding that patients have access to their records, and helping to, to make that happen.

Interviewer: What are some of the characteristics that nurses have that allow us to be good informatics nurses?

Joyce Sensmeier: To me one of the major qualities that nurses bring to informatics naturally is communications skills. Informatics is all about communications. It's getting information in the right... in the right way, in the right place, a user-friendly access, applying technology to that. And nurses bring the communication skills that they've learned from dealing with patients on a... on a daily basis. And, certainly, not just patients. When you think about an 8-hour, 10-hour, now 12-hour shift that nurses work, how many people they interface with during that time, how they have to organize their day to get the things accomplished that they do. The patients are only in, in the hospital environment for a very short period of time. Nurses only have a short connection with patients, even in

home health care environments. So you have to be able to understand what's go on quickly, communicate to the patients, communicate with other caregivers glean information that you can out of the chart, but make things happen. So to me, the, the basic skill that we bring is, is communication.

Certainly, another is the organizational skills that go around that, helping to, to get all of the care that the patient needs done in a short period of time, and be successful at that, and have them be alive and well at the end of the day is quite a goal to accomplish, and nurses are great at that.

Interviewer: Is there anything that you would like to add?

Joyce Sensmeier: One of the things that I've been thinking about related to the history is I hope that we can capture some of the stories. Every informatics nurse that I talk to has a unique story, a funny thing that happened, something that just because it's a new specialty that we all have an experience before. One of the stories I heard was a colleague of mine was doing training at a community hospital, and one of the nurses that came in for training took the mouse, put in on the floor, and used it as if it was a sewing machine tread... you know, treadle on the floor, pedal, I guess we could say. So that's the kind of stories that I hope that you're going to be able to capture in this... video, because I don't want to lose that.

Joyce Sensmeier: When I first took the position as Director of Professional Services at HIMSS, one of the things that they wanted from my role is a representation of the people that I used to work with and the person, the role that I used to play within our community hospital. HIMSS is focused on health care IT across many specialties. We have corporate members, we have individual members, all working on health care information technology in multiple different ways. But our organization did not really have a core competency related to, to nursing, or even the content perspective. So as a nurse coming into the organization at HIMSS, they really looked to me to help them understand what our members needed. So at HIMSS, they always respected my role, and I have to say still do. And I've been fortunate to be able to have a series of promotions there to really recognize that role. So

within the organization never ran into an issue of being a nurse and that being a negative thing. It's always been a very positive reinforcement, which I know is sometimes unique in, in our industry, and there's a little bit more bias against nursing sometimes, but in my particular organization there has not.

So it's been... it's been a wonderful opportunity for me to be appreciated as a nurse, to have them want to elicit out from me what nurses need, how nurses think, and apply that to the work that our organization does.

Joyce Sensmeier: The issue of funding is key for nursing and certainly relates to nursing informatics. I think one of the drivers for the Alliance for Nursing Informatics is we can have that united voice begin to influence what the research agenda should be, and then to help elicit funding to, to make that happen. Personally, it was always a challenge to travel, find enough resources to be able to do that. So, personally, I have felt that the financial component is really key. Hospitals don't always have the funds to fill... certainly; they don't have the funds to send every nurse to everything, so they have to be very selective in where they allocate the dollars. And so I get a certain amount of funding myself to... and use my vacation time to help make those things happen.

So through the Alliance for Nursing Informatics, I'm hopeful that we can elicit more of that funding, get sponsorship, so that nurses, like, like the nurse that I was and still am at sometimes can afford to go to the events they need to go to, that projects can be funded to help achieve some of our goals, that we can begin to see more of, of the dollars flowing to our specialty.

End of Interview