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Health Informatics Community Priming in a Small Nation: The New Zealand Experience

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Abstract and Objective

New Zealand (NZ) has a rapidly expanding health information technology (IT) development industry and wide-ranging use of informatics, especially in the primary health sector. The New Zealand government through the National Health IT Board (NHITB) has promised to provide shared care health records of core information for all New Zealanders by 2014. One of the major barriers to improvement in IT use in healthcare is the dearth of trained and interested clinicians, management and technical workforce. Health Informatics New Zealand (HINZ) and the academic community in New Zealand are attempting to remedy this by raising awareness of health informatics at the grass roots level via free "primer" workshops and by developing a sustainable cross-institutional model of educational opportunities. Support from the NHITB has been forthcoming, and the workshops start in early 2013. This poster presents the process, development and preliminary findings of this work.

Keywords: Medical Informatics; Education, Continuing

Introduction

A 2006 report noted that more people need to be trained in health informatics in NZ, especially those already in the workforce [1]. The same report identified the need for greater cooperation between institutions, and for increased awareness of the domain in the health and IT communities. Online health informatics education is available in NZ [2], but many employees remain unable to convince employers they should be given the time and/or funding for training in this area. Additionally, transferring credits between different NZ tertiary education institutions can be relatively difficult. With the publication of the National Health IT Plan [3] and the commitment to a shared core electronic health record by 2014, the requirement for a better-trained workforce has become imperative.

Methods

HINZ, a member society of IMIA, established an education working group, comprising academics from all interested NZ universities. Based on the 2006 report and IMIA guidelines [4], a list of required competencies was drawn up. A 2 hour primer workshop was developed for delivery in clinical and technical settings, by members of the HINZ academic group.

Results

Core competences identified were: health domain knowledge, social/ethics/legal aspects of health IT, basic computer science, basic data management, basic health IS/IT management, clinical information systems and health informatics concepts. Mapping of the universities' professional and academic courses to specific competencies has been produced.

Funding has been obtained from the NHITB for a series of 'primer' workshops based around health informatics concepts. Each member of the academic group will deliver the workshop to local healthcare organizations. As part of this primer, a questionnaire has been developed to identify gaps in attendee knowledge, to assess primer quality and to identify gaps in provision and the sector's potential long-term requirements. Modifications to existing courses and the need for additional courses have been identified.

Conclusion

Health informatics education is needed to ensure a welleducated workforce competent to use IT to deliver on national health strategies. A 'primer' has been developed to raise this awareness in the NZ health sector workforce and to provide bridging into further education. Research into the specific requirements of learners is continuing.

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