

## Guest editorial

SACJ 50, July 2013

---

### HISA Special Section

Dr Nicky Mostert-Phipps  
Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University  
South Africa

Nicky.Mostert-Phipps@nmmu.ac.za

### Prof Anthony Maeder

University of Western Sydney  
Australia

A.Maeder@uws.edu.au

This edition of *SACJ* contains a special topic section on Health Informatics, with invited contributions from the authors of the most highly rated papers presented in the recent Health Informatics South Africa (HISA) 2013 conference organised by the South African Health Informatics Association (SAHIA).

SAHIA was formed in 1982 as a not-for-profit association and members include individuals who seek to improve the lives of patients, health institutions, and health informaticians through peer review, workshops, Health Informatics related conferences, and Special Interest Groups. SAHIA represents South African Health Informatics nationally and internationally, notably through the International Medical Informatics Association (IMIA) of which SAHIA is a member. The goals and objectives of SAHIA includes the promotion of the Health Informatics profession, stimulating the advancement of Health Informatics in South Africa, as well as maintaining close co-operation with organisations with related aims and objectives.

The HISA conference is the bi-annual meeting of SAHIA and has been run continuously since 1985. HISA allows participants in the field of health informatics to gather and exchange ideas and provides a platform for sharing research and experiences in health informatics by bringing together researchers, practitioners, consultants, and suppliers in a cooperative environment. HISA 2013 was held from 3 to 5 July in Port Elizabeth and the theme, 'Empowering Patients and Healthcare Professionals with Information and Technologies', touched on the importance of healthcare technology solutions that empower both patient and healthcare professionals with the information necessary to achieve healthcare goals. For more information on HISA 2013 please visit <http://hisa.nmmu.ac.za>. Following on the success of the 2013 conference the next HISA is scheduled to take place in Cape Town in 2014.

Health Informatics is a rapidly emerging field which enables the intersection of computing, clinical and organisational practices in healthcare. A strong underpinning body of knowledge has been defined and

variously interpreted within the above three domains: in USA the field has been recognised as a clinical sub-speciality (termed "Clinical Informatics"), and in much of the world "Health Information Management" is an accredited professional qualification in the health sector.

Strong drivers for the use of Health Informatics arise in the developed world from safety and quality improvement agendas, and from the financial pressures of health service delivery for ageing population profiles which stress the existing healthcare environment and dictate need for new models of care. This has led to considerable effort in establishing Electronic Health Records managed within Clinical Information Systems (often termed eHealth), and much consequential attention to interoperability and ontology. In the developing world, Health Informatics has contributed more strongly in providing mechanisms for disease/condition specific healthcare delivery, including maternal/child health and infectious disease control through guidance of the Millenium Development Goals. Across both of these domains, numerous challenging computing problems arise, such as the replication of clinical decision making in Clinical Decision Support Systems, and the leveraging of wireless connectivity to allow wide use of mobile devices (mHealth).

The topics covered in this special edition target some high importance areas for Health Informatics, and will be of widespread contemporary interest internationally. The two papers included are based on preliminary versions accepted for the HISA conference, but they have been substantially expanded and thereafter independently reviewed by the full SACJ process. Each paper addresses a distinctive topic within the Health Informatics spectrum, and offers relevant insights on that topic in a South African (and broader African) context. Jason Cohen et al. in "Exploring South African Physicians Acceptance of e-Prescribing Technology" present a case study on technology acceptance in the health sector and the related challenges of change management and

multiprofessional human interaction. Funmi Adebesein et al. in “A Review of Interoperability Standards in e-Health and Imperatives for their Adoption in Africa” provide a comprehensive overview of health data representation and messaging standards and discuss the issues affecting their slow adoption in the region. These papers collectively provide interesting examples of two different (but complementary) disciplinary perspectives in the Health Informatics field: those

of clinical practice and leadership, and information systems abstraction.

It is hoped that readers find this special edition focus to be of sufficient interest to justify repetition in future years, as Health Informatics continues to grow as a discipline and focus is placed increasingly on capturing the benefits and opportunities it offers, in a global setting.

---