

Editorial

Genesis of a UK Faculty of Clinical Informatics at a time of anticipation for some, and ruby, golden and diamond celebrations for others

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INTRODUCTION

The health informatics community has had variable success over the years to establish its identity, in terms of what defines its core theory, technologies and who its practitioners are. This Editorial coincides with the launch of the UK Faculty of Clinical Informatics (FCI), which will help define clinical informatics practitioners. Simultaneously, we have seen the launch of a Federation of Informatics Professionals (Fed-IP) for those outside the clinically regulated disciplines. Coincidentally, the creation of the faculty coincides with the 40th (ruby), 50th (golden) and 60th (diamond) anniversaries.

- The European Federation for Medical Informatics (EFMI) has celebrated its 40th year. EFMI is a federation of national informatics associations across Europe. It still debates its core theory.^{1,2}
- The Royal College of General Practitioners Research and Surveillance Centre has celebrated 50 years of using routine data for national flu and respiratory disease surveillance.³ However, the informatics achievement of being one of the first units to recognise the value of routine record data has been an epiphenomenon – a feature flagged by Sullivan as a limitation of our discipline.⁴
- We have celebrated 60 years of the British Computer Society (BCS), which has recognised practitioners through its membership and fellowship, and provided a valued forum for learning and developing practice.^{5,6}

DEFINING INFORMATICS AS TECHNOLOGY, ROLE OR BY ITS CORE THEORY

Staggers and Thompson set out how informatics can be defined by its use of technology, the roles within our discipline or as a concept. Whilst several leaders in our field have suggested that a focus on technology leaves an academic void, potentially obscuring any core academic theory, the development and utilisation



Figure 1 Interplay between theory, roles and technology. The practice and technologies of informatics have been predominant. We anticipate that FCI and Fed-IP will enhance the professional identity and standards. Informatics core theory requires greater development

of technology remains key to our discipline, and is possibly the largest focus of development (Figure 1). The importance of defining the role of an informatician has long been recognised, and the creation by the International Medical Informatics Association of the International Academy of Health Sciences Informatics, with a cohort of Foundation Fellows, is a marker of the global recognition of the need to better define informatics practitioners.⁷ This is also true of the development of the role of the chief clinical information officer (CCIO), albeit the role still lacks a single precise definition.⁸

UK landscape: faculties, federations, colleges and societies

In the UK, we now have a new FCI⁹: a Fed-IP working across health and social care professionals; Royal Colleges that have informatics groups and BCS, the senior learned society in the informatics domain.

UK FCI

The creation of an FCI is very welcome. The need for the UK Faculty has not just been driven by a wish to develop informatics as a discipline. Rather, General Medical Council (GMC) requirements for appraisal meant that many clinicians who have taken on informatics roles (e.g. CCIOs and other roles) could no longer appraise in the speciality they originally specialised in, and such roles would be impossible to fill without a route to appraisal and revalidation.

The Fed-IP in health and care

Fed-IP is the UK-focused, but internationally connected, registration body for health and care informatics professionals.¹⁰ The professional institutions that are members of Fed-IP collaborate to set and maintain the professional standards of health and care informatics, including the publication of a professional register. It will begin professionally registering individuals in early 2018. The founder member bodies are:

- Institute of Health Records and Information Management;
- Socitm – The Society for IT practitioners in the public sector;
- CILIP – The Library and Information Association;
- BCS – The Chartered Institute for IT.

Whilst progress is being made, Fed-IP currently lacks the equivalent driver to the GMC, and other clinical professional bodies.

Royal colleges and societies

The various UK Royal Colleges generally have informatics groups, for example, the Royal College of Physicians Health Informatics Unit. Their focus tends to be on the safe use of technology, record and data quality and health informatics careers – a focus on technology and roles, rather than on developing core theory. BCS, with its Royal Charter, and its membership, fellowships and ability to award chartered status has many similarities to the Royal Colleges associated with the clinical specialisms. However, BCS has

looked to work collaboratively with other bodies to accredit the health and care informatics role, in recognition that it is a broad field.

CONCLUSION

The creation of FCI and Fed-IP are very welcome. We hope that the two bodies will continue their cooperative relationship and converge as far as regulation will permit. Alongside

the importance of technology, we are seeing recognition of the role of the informatician. Interestingly, we are seeing a new generation of bodies forming internationally, specifically to reinforce professional roles in informatics. The ongoing challenge for our discipline is better definition of its core theory. We see a role for this journal in documenting and critically appraising these developments. It is great to see the genesis of this new faculty – at a time when others are celebrating ruby, golden and diamond jubilees.

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