From the Desk of the President
Dr Michael Legg
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June 10, 2009

Elton Humphery
Committee Secretary
community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Mr Humphrey,

Your letter to the Committee of Presidents of Medical Colleges inviting submissions has been passed to us through our association with the Pathology Associations Council.

The Health Informatics Society of Australia (HISA) is a scientific society representing the largest and broadest grouping of expertise in eHealth in Australia with members drawn from consumers, clinicians and other health information systems users as well as engineers, technologists, systems developers and researchers.

HISA commends the attention that is being shown to the health workforce by this Bill and supports the establishment of the Commission.

HISA in previous submissions including to the National Health and Hospital Reform Commission (attached for your convenience) has identified health informaticians as an important class of health worker where there is both a current shortage and the prospect of a worsening position whereby Australian Healthcare Agreements and proposed national and State programmes in eHealth will be jeopardized.

At the request of the Department of Health and Ageing, HISA is currently preparing a review of the health informatics workforce. This is due for completion by 30th June 2009.

We ask that where appropriate that health informaticians are included as a specific category in any planning or development activity associated with the health workforce.

We would be pleased to provide any further advice that the committee might be seeking.


With kind regards,

Michael Legg

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30 May 2008

National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission,

## HISA Submission

The Health Informatics Society of Australia (HISA) is the largest and broadest grouping of expertise in eHealth in Australia with members drawn from consumers, clinicians and other health information systems users as well as engineers, technologists, systems developers, managers, policy developers and researchers.

With the Australian Healthcare and Hospital Association (AHHA), HISA has elsewhere provided the Commission with a 'Policy Position on Information Management' which draws on work undertaken by the Society in the last year including a survey-based report entitled 'A Vision for an Australian Healthcare System Transformed by Health Informatics'[1].

**The purpose of this submission is to focus on two issues that the Society believes is of vital importance to achieving the aims of the National Health and Hospital Reform Commission.  They are:**

1. **Having an adequate skills base and workforce in health informatics**
2. **Making the best use of the expertise in health informatics that we do have**

The Commission would be well aware of the national programs in eHealth that most developed countries in the world have initiated.  None of the programs has been without problem but some are doing better than others.

A major cause of failure and/or delay in these, often expensive, initiatives has consistently been identified as the lack of people with appropriate skills and/or failed planning because well documented mistakes are repeated through a lack of understanding of the knowledge domain which is health informatics.

In order to address both issues there needs to be recognition of the health informatics domain of knowledge and of the expertise required to design and implement systems for effective management and use of information in the health sector.

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[1]See http://www.hisa.org.au/system/files/u1/rmed_by_Health_Informatics_v8_Public_Release_3.pdf

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We believe that Australia does not have enough trained people to complete the currently planned information infrastructure work.  However over the last two years we have seen universities exiting or winding back their health informatics programs.  While it is recognised that market forces must, to an extent, dictate training there also has to be some forward thinking about what might be needed in the (near) future or this will severely limit our development and the options available.

The most successful of the national programs in other countries (such as Canada's) have a close working relationship between the Government and the national health informatics societies (COACH in Canada's case) and through them engagement with the entire sector.  These programs also have a record of working closely with their national standards development organisations and medical software industry.  This has not been a characteristic of the Australian effort to date.

**We recommend then:**

1. **That any review of skills development or planning of health workforce includes, as a specific category, health informaticians**

2. **That the offers made by HISA, Standards Australia, HL7 Australia and the Medical Software Industry Association to work more closely with Governments in the planning and Governance of eHealth in Australia be accepted and facilitated**

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President