

Editorial

Welcome to the HINZ forum edition of HICIRO. Papers in this quarter's journal have been presented at the 2008 HINZ forum in Rotorua . The theme of the conference was "Improving and exploiting our information", and the papers in this issue reflect aspects of the lifecycle of information – from collection, to storage, to use, but with a strong emphasis on the latter two.

Two papers by Patrick and colleagues address one of the great challenges of modern information use, how to reuse information when it has been collected in a way that did not anticipate further processing. The use of SNOMED CT vocabulary and the associated mapping of terms into ICD codes and other destinations seems to be gaining ground. The work involves a partnership between informaticians and clinicians, in order to identify suitable subsets (F38). The task of rescuing data is discussed in the second paper by Patrick (F39), This activity is perhaps more common and crucial than we would like. Kerr's paper on metadata repositories perhaps shows a way to begin avoiding such a process (F11).

The paper by Mabotuwana, and co-authors (F13) emphasises the need to locate information within a semantic framework, in order to use it effectively. Knowing what information means, and how it can help in healthcare is the ultimate requirement for any health information system. Decision support systems have been seen as a key user of information, but as Warren points out (F15), evaluating the effectiveness of such systems is important. As with any other part of healthcare an evidence-based approach is necessary to guide investment development and deployment.

Finally two papers, one by Mackenzie (F24) and the other by Warren (F27) deal with the issues involved with getting useful information to patients. One of the overriding themes of the conference was the need for people to have access to relevant and accurate health information. Warren's paper demonstrates the high standards demanded by tech-savvy young people when information is being provided to them. It also begins to explore the role that such people have in navigating information sources for older relatives and friends. The paper about text messaging to support family planning communication gives some interesting insights into the take-up of such a service, and practical hints on how to set this sort of system up.

As time goes by, the emphasis is shifting from the collection of information to its use. Health informatics professionals have a key role in this process, in particular in assessing and auditing the impact of such systems. By adding an evidence base of effectiveness the usefulness of health information systems can be demonstrated – along with the usefulness of health informaticians !