AMIA president’s message

Since beginning my role as AMIA President and CEO in July 2009, I have been consistently impressed by the intensity and range of activities and programs within our organization. These events are lived and managed by AMIA staff members and by our volunteer leaders (including especially the Chair and members of our Board of Directors). They are aimed at meeting the needs of our members, the informatics and health information technology communities, and policy makers who need to understand informatics and its relationship to health, health care, and biomedical research. AMIA has many important and effective contributions, the most visible of which are through our multiple meetings and our journal, JAMIA.

This issue of the journal introduces JAMIA’s new editor, Lucila Ohno-Machado. Lucila has a number of strategies both to continue the quality of our two past editors and to enhance JAMIA for our continuously expanding readership. It has been my pleasure to know Lucila for a number of years, and I look forward to working with her and supporting her new JAMIA role.

This issue of JAMIA is also introducing a new section of the journal for information from AMIA to our members and readers. In these columns, which will appear regularly in JAMIA, I or other association leaders will be offering messages about some aspect of the latest developments with which AMIA is involved. My hope is that a series of such summaries over the course of each year will convey to you the “big picture” of a remarkably dynamic and effective professional association, keeping its pulse on all the areas about which you—its members and subscribers—are passionate and in which you are deeply interested.

For those of you who attended AMIA’s 34th Annual Symposium in Washington, DC (November 2010), you saw first-hand the tangible success of some of the most intensive efforts that keep our staff busy for much of the second half of the calendar year. The Annual Symposium featured 102 scientific sessions and 364 posters. It attracted 2130 registrants, 70 exhibitors (accounting for another 300 attendees), and over 800 tutorial participants. Yet the numbers cannot fully capture the sense of excitement, engagement, and camaraderie that characterized the meeting, which seems to get better and more varied every year. If attendees express any frustration with the Symposium, it is that they find it difficult to choose among events that occur at the same time. To help to address this problem, you can catch the depth, breadth, and excitement of the Symposium online at http://symposium2010.amia.org/, where a number of video segments provide highlights of this richly stimulating and educational event. For the first time, the Symposium Proceedings are also available to attendees and AMIA members online rather than on the traditional CD-ROM; go to http://proceedings.amia.org/ to browse, download papers, or otherwise peruse the Symposium’s rich content. Over the year that lies ahead, you will also find at this site an online archive of past proceedings, as we seek to use the electronic media to facilitate access to all of our scientific meetings and their research or educational content.

As a glance at JAMIA’s new cover will have indicated to you, AMIA enters the calendar year with a new face to the world! At the 2010 Symposium, AMIA revealed a fresh logo to replace the previous association symbol in use for the last two-plus decades. The new symbol reflects substantial research done within the AMIA community, with input from external sources as well. It also has been incorporated into the new look for the journal. We believe the new association logo better conveys AMIA’s and JAMIA’s future orientations, their cutting-edge focus on informatics, biomedicine and health, and their forward-thinking and innovative approach to bringing positive change to healthcare, healthcare delivery, life sciences, and national health policy. A new tagline also has been adopted to describe AMIA and its membership more appropriately. Along with the logo, you’ll often see: Informatics Professionals. Leading the Way. AMIA’s leaders believe that this phrase is effectively descriptive of those in our field and hope you agree.

As in the past, certain key products from the AMIA Board of Directors, or from task forces or other groups that they have appointed, will appear as special papers in JAMIA. In fact, there are two such papers in the current issue, one dealing with AMIA’s policy meeting from 2009, and the other reporting on an important study by an AMIA task force that examined issues related to contracting between information system vendors and their hospital or health system clients.

There is a lot of new thinking going on around all parts of AMIA these days and you will likely notice new language describing the association as “the center of action,” and “the voice of the profession.” We are reaching out to many new audiences and communities, often using a more casual, vernacular style to make AMIA accessible and understandable to anyone interested in supporting us, joining us, reporting about us, or just observing us.

Future columns in this series will cover pressing topics about which I often feel that our members, and the external community, are not being optimally informed. AMIA’s policy work, for example, is having a major influence in the health policy community, but surveys suggest that our members, and readers of JAMIA, are not always aware of those activities or the growing reputation that AMIA has developed as an objective source of education and policy advice. Similarly, we are reaching out to constituencies that have not always felt at home in AMIA—but which are crucial to our growth, quality, and effectiveness. These include the corporate world, in which many graduates of informatics degree programs are making major contributions as researchers, managers, entrepreneurs, consultants, or executives. Our new Vice President of Corporate Relations, Jonathan Grau, is working diligently to build relationships with industry and to bring more corporate partners to our meetings and our membership. Similarly, we are eager to enhance the organization’s role in supporting informatics practitioners, and especially those in healthcare systems, such as CMOs and CNIOs. Our new bootcamp series, successfully offered during the last two years, is testimony to our commitment to this growing community.

The changes and activities I have described are not simply cosmetic. They indicate a new awareness and commitment to make AMIA an even more influential and effective force for the field of informatics, its practical applications, and its importance to the health of populations both domestically and globally. One major change, which will affect all our members as well, is the unveiling of a totally new web site, which will occur over the next few months. The developing new http://www.amia.org was previewed in the AMIA booth at the November symposium, and was met with enthusiastic reviews. The new AMIA web site is more modern and dynamic with new navigation and content and we believe it will provide a more rewarding online experience.

One of my goals is to assure that AMIA members are consistently proud of their organization, are excited to be a part of it, and will want to maintain their membership, their readership of JAMIA, and their participation at our various scientific and educational offerings throughout their careers. AMIA is growing, even at a time of economic downturn in our society, and resources do not always match our aspirations, thereby requiring prudent prioritization and careful budgeting. But we look to our members for regular feedback about what is working and what can be improved; please send us your comments or suggestions at any time.

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The purpose of the Messages from AMIA section is for AMIA to communicate and involve its current and potential members in AMIA. The messages on these pages reflect the goals and direction of AMIA’s board of directors and leaders only. These pages are designed to inspire members and readers to connect with the association on strategic objectives and activities. We hope you will find them a useful tool for keeping connected to AMIA leadership. We welcome your thoughts and feedback.