

IMIA-LAC

The Latin-American and Caribbean Federation of Health Informatics

Introduction

IMIA-LAC, the Latin American/Caribbean Chapter of IMIA, covers a wide and diverse region, including 560 million people living in two dozen countries from polar to tropical climates, speaking mostly Spanish and Portuguese (180 million people speak Portuguese in Brazil), but also English as well as Créole in the Caribbean. Currently there are four National Member Societies from the region represented in IMIA (Argentina, Brazil, Cuba and Uruguay), as well as one National Observer Member (Mexico). There are other Countries from the region which have individual corresponding members, such as Chile, Colombia, and Peru. Venezuela has recently created its National Society.

The current conduction of IMIA-LAC started in April 2006, with Dr. Alvaro Margolis from Uruguay as President and Dr. Nora Oliveri from Argentina as Secretary. It has had the continued support from Dr. Lincoln A. Moura, the past President.

The first action taken by the new Board was to agree on strategic goals for the next three years.

Strategic goals

A summary of them follows:

1) Strengthen the network of Health Informatics Societies in Latin America and the Caribbean

It is apparent the low percentage of IMIA National Members in the region. In each Country there is a need for:

- Health Informatics Societies which are representative of the diverse professional groups involved in the

subject across the Country,

- With a strong link to the Academia and the Government,
- That are considered representative both within and outside the Country,

In order to induce the necessary changes listed in the following section.

2) Define the main topics to promote and the groups in charge of doing it

The imprecise and vast concept of Health Informatics prevents from attaining concrete achievements. Some priority areas were then selected:

a) Integrated health information systems (electronic health record, e-prescribing, among others). Within this area, IMIA-LAC could sponsor and support:

- The legal and regulatory body for each Country.
- The adoption of standards.
- Learning in critical success areas in the start up of clinical information systems, such as organizational change.

b) Teaching Health Informatics, both for graduate students at Schools of Medicine and other Health Disciplines, as well as at the level of training of Health Informatics Professionals.

At the same time, IMIA-LAC could be a collaborative space, integrating other areas, such as:

- Nursing informatics,
- Medical imaging and PACS,
- Integrated Health Information Systems,
- Telemedicine,
- Computer-assisted education,
- Bio-informatics.

For this to happen there is a need for interest groups becoming in charge of the areas.

Finally, there is a need to move on from "Budget Zero", as it is now, to a Budget that would allow IMIA-LAC to accomplish the established goals.

Steps taken

The first step was to create an electronic list for the IMIA-LAC Board, including National, Observer and Corresponding members from the region. The languages of the list are Spanish and Portuguese, to promote participation. The concept is to be inclusive, and there has been an important initial traffic in the list, to discuss strategic goal number 1. The address is imia-lac-board@informaticamedica.net.

As a result of this discussion and other communications and personal visits within the region, there seem to be several Countries moving from individual Corresponding members to National Societies, such as Bolivia and Chile. There is interest in moving forward in other Countries too (Perú, Colombia). There is a plan to promote Virtual Medical Informatics Activities in 2007, and a Regional Congress in 2008. Bids for location of the latter are open.

There is a need for coordination and support from Societies from other Countries and Regions, such as Spain – which shares with most of the region the same language and culture - or the United States and Canada – which belong to the Americas -.

Coordination with the American Medical Informatics Association is taking place, through its International Committee. This likely support from a Society from a developed Country belonging to the Americas may allow a faster achievement of IMIA-LAC goals, eventually leading to a new Federation (IMIA-Americas).

Dr. Alvaro Margolis, IMIA-LAC President,

On behalf of the IMIA-LAC Board
margolis@mednet.org.uy