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IMIA General Assembly Copenhagen 1996
Report of the President

The Vancouver Medinfo was the summit of IMIA's development out of the pioneering days of Medical Informatics. During the General Assembly it also became clear that the size of the organization and the fact that a new generation of Medical Informatics specialists represented by IMIA's Members are demanding a new efficient infrastructure, electronic services, and a truly international forum for discussions and information exchange. As well, Industrial and Academic Institutional Members require our attention.

Our former President, M. Ball, initiated many strategically relevant changes in IMIA. The current Board has been following this line and supported the change. I owe my thanks to all Vice-Presidents, to the Regional Presidents and the Members of the Executive Board for their cooperation. By participating in several annual national conferences (eg. in the UK, in Italy, in Israel, and in Korea), I had the opportunity to learn what individual members of our National Societies expect from IMIA. In discussions with colleagues from Latin America and Europe as well as with AMIA's President, R. Miller, we developed a better understanding of the pros and cons of Institutional Membership. Here I owe special thanks to our VP Membership K. Hannah and to M. Ball for their valuable advice.

During the past three years, our Vice President for Working Groups (WGs) and Special Interest Groups (SIGs) has overhauled our Working Groups and SIGs. In addition, he has initiated new Working Groups in fields of leading edge research or international standardization (e.g. Working Group 16). J. R. Scherrer has taken over the Presidency of the European Federation of Medical Informatics (congratulations !); he will be able to continue this effort with his successor and thus link closely the Working Groups of the European Region with those of the international organization. Effectively this has already been done by reestablishing the former Working Group 9 (Health Informatics for Development); in this situation IMIA will support an initiative of EFMI and build a new Special Interest Group for Development which will primarily be supported by IMIA's Regions. J. R. Scherrer's vision of moving the Working Groups back to the original IFIP idea of being international fora of highly valued experts in the field will become true again with the newly available electronic communication means. With this new communication technology, IMIA will be able to overcome the problems of low travel funds worldwide. We expect many new activities to be undertaken including the formation of new Working Groups. This will enhance IMIA's attractiveness to our Institutional Members; they can be part of leading edge activities.

Without solid financing, no institution can survive. Through the success of Medinfo '95 and the reliable procedures of our treasurers A. Bakker and J. Tresling, IMIA is prepared for the establishment of a permanent secretariat. The Standing Orders for handling IMIA's finances have been detailed as to ensure that IMIA's financial manoeuvrability is as well secured as the transparency of financial transactions for the Members.

Many difficulties had to be handled regarding National- and Corresponding Membership. I owe my thanks to Regional Presidents A. Espinosa, K.C. Lun, and S. Isaacs for their advice. A very friendly link could be maintained with J. Bryant from the European Federation.

One of the most important activities of IMIA are the triannual Medinfos. The Board met with the Organizing Committee, the Scientific Program Committee, and Editorial Committee in Korea early in 1996. It was hosted with warm Korean hospitality. Our thanks go to Prof Koh and Prof Shin who arranged the meeting. In the meantime, S. Huesing has prepared documentation on how Medinfo 1995 was organized. This documentation was bought by IMIA and handed over to the Koreans who will add new documentation of their efforts to it. With this procedure, IMIA will get a transparent history of the organizational background of its Medinfos and it will become easier to prepare tenders and organizational charts for future Medinfos. I am very much looking forward to the next two years of cooperation with Ms Kim/INTERCOM and Ms Kim/COVAN for the preparation of the conference and the exhibition. IMIA decided in Korea that it is prepared to invest money in the success of the next Medinfo by establishing software programs and documentation which eases the gigantic job of organizing the global conference. Again, thanks to B. Cesnik and S. Huesing for their support. The key success factor for Medinfo '98 will be participation of Japanese delegates. Therefore, we are extremely thankful that S. Kaihara as Vice President Medinfo is establishing many contacts between the Korean organizers and their Japanese counterparts to make sure that there will be a strong Japanese participation in Korea in 1998.

With the head of the Nominations Committee (father of the IMIA Bylaws and Standing Orders), H. Peterson, as well as the Vice president for Special Affairs (A. Bakker) several meetings and discussions took place to transfer the governing of IMIA from the Medical Informatics pioneers to the hands of the next professional generation. This means that many rules and regulations which have been natural for the pioneers have to be documented so that the friendly and effective code of conduct of IMIA can be transferred to the next generation. This process has nearly been finished. The final step will be to establish a permanent IMIA Secretariat which will support every IMIA officer in his job.

In the meantime, H. Peterson and M. Ball will start the IMIA Senior Officers Club as discussed during the Board Meeting in Chapalla in 1995.

The IMIA Yearbook and the IMIA Newsletter have undergone changes which originated in M. Ball's Presidency. Through the cooperation with Olive Tree, the IMIA Yearbook could earn some money and became less dependent on the finances of the organization. The outstanding efforts of J. van Bommel's and A. McCray's team in Rotterdam and Washington have to be mentioned. The IMIA Newsletter has been transformed by Th. Kleinoeder (the technical editor) to a mixed electronic/print media which becomes the basis of the new IMIA electronic infrastructure and the IMIA Intranet. Without his activities, in cooperation with my secretary J. Brinkkoetter, it would not have been possible to transform the Membership lists from the Vice President Membership and the IMIA Secretary on an e-mail file server. It is now necessary to harmonize the various IMIA homepages and activities of Working Groups so that the cooperate identity of the International Medical Informatics Association is identifiable. For this purpose we will convene the most active centers in this field which are coworkers from J. Bommel and R. Haux in Heidelberg (WG 1).

Besides restructuring IMIA and its membership, launching an African Region, building up an electronic infrastructure, and supporting Medinfo '98, the analysis of an appropriate solution for the IMIA Secretariat was the main project of the President. Together with J. R. Scherrer, J. van Bommel, M. Ball, and H. Peterson and many others we have interviewed several people who might serve in this function. The various aspects of the IMIA Secretariat have been discussed with highly competent colleagues in all IMIA Regions. I spent many days in trying to understand what is financially possible. I have the feeling that the question of a permanent Secretariat is closely linked to the question of how to support the IMIA Regions in Latin- America, Asia and Africa. Without the critical voices of the Committee which the general Assembly set up for this question it would not have been possible to establish the plan which I want to follow with the approval of the General Assembly in the years to come. This plan is based on cost calculations by a Finnish economist at my department in Goettingen, who analyzed various alternatives of installing the IMIA Intranet.

IMIA's international links have traditionally been focused on the World Health Organization, (WHO, S. Mandil, Director Advisor on Health Informatics), International Federation of Information Processing (IFIP, K. Bauknecht, President), and the National Library of Medicine (NLM, D.A.B. Lindberg, Director). Since 1994, we have established additional links to the European Union and the G-7 Projects (EU-Health Telematics Program, J.Cl. Healey, Head of Unit) and recently to the

Foundation "Health on the Net" (HON, , Executive Director). The outstanding cooperative activity was definitely the joint support with WHO of HELINA '96.

I close my report with thanks to B. Solheim, our Secretary, who prepares our Board Meeting and General Assembly, and to all Chairpersons of IMIA's WGs and SIGs for their job. Their productive work is the driving engine of IMIA.

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Reference: Otto Rienhoff/BRI IMIA96\President report