

## **Short Organizational History**

*Like other organizations, IMIA has been in large part shaped by the individuals within it. Those influencing and guiding IMIA include its country representatives, working group members, regional liaisons, and MEDINFO attendees. Over the years, the commitment to IMIA has been remarkable. Some individuals "present since the creation" are still active within the organization, either on the Board, on committees, or within the various working groups. With the continued evolution of informatics, IMIA is now seeing another generation of professionals join its numbers. The young scientist award granted at MEDINFO will, the IMIA Board hopes, bring the next generation as well. As a volunteer organization, IMIA has been shaped by its presidents in their leadership roles. All have left their mark on the organization. Through the years, IMIA has grown and changed. Today the Board and the membership are taking new measures to ensure that IMIA continues to be a vital organization representing health informatics world wide.*

*This text is an updated and extended version of a paper by M. Ball in 1993*

### ***Starting the Movement***

#### ***Francois Gremy, France, IMIA President 1968-1975***

*In 1967, Francois Gremy established TC4, a Technical Committee within the International Federation for Information Processing (IFIP). As first chairman and moderator of TC4, Gremy is considered the first President of its renamed and refocused successor, the International Medical Informatics Association (IMIA). The role of IFIP-TC4 in bringing together early health-informaticians cannot be underestimated. Although TC4 was composed in large part of computer professionals interested in medical applications, Gremy recruited the first generations of IMIA officers and members from the medical and health care communities. Intellectually as well as organizationally, IFIP-TC4 was the true predecessor of IMIA. During Gremy's term, the first global conference on Medical Informatics (1974 MEDINFO in Stockholm) took place.*

#### ***MEDINFO 1974: Stockholm, Sweden.***

### ***Transforming the organization***

#### ***Jan Roukens, The Netherlands, IMIA President 1975-1980***

*The second President of IMIA, Jan Roukens was deeply involved with the transition from IFIP-TC4 to IMIA. Increasingly, medical computing became a field where the computer and medical worlds met, and IMIA was established to meet the needs of professionals from both.*

*National member societies from around the globe were offered seats on the board.*

*The European Federation for Medical Informatics (EFMI) was established to accommodate regionalization by allowing its member societies to "move" immediately into IMIA, giving IMIA credibility from the beginning. IMIA was formally established by IFIP in 1979, with specific bylaws giving it measure of autonomy. Roukens was elected President. "In retrospect," he muses, "it seems quite incredible that all of this was in fact realised in a period of little more than two years!" Speaking of key players in those early days, he remarks, "Oh, there were so incredibly many. I could talk names for half hour without interruption. Thinking back to those days and all those people gives a warm feeling, and of richness without end."*

*According to Roukens, IMIA succeeded by giving its members a platform, an intellectual framework, for discussion. "Its domain of discourse is scientific and essentially liberal."*

### **MEDINFO 1980: Tokyo, Japan**

#### ***Building an International Membership***

##### ***David B. Shires, Canada, IMIA President 1980-1983***

*David B. Shires assumed the IMIA presidency in 1980, one year after the transition from TC4. During his term, Shires reached agreements with the regional group for Central and South America, known as IMIA-LAC (Latin American Countries), and the most populous country in the world, the People's Republic of China (PRC), making them active participating members in IMIA.*

*Shires saw IMIA as a family, within which "the then USSR and Eastern Bloc countries as well as other countries such as Cuba, could indulge in animated and mutually productive discussions with their western counterparts, with each respecting the other's political differences." IMIA worked to become meaningful to developing countries and forged new bonds with the World Health Organization.*

*In 1992, Shires reflected that "IMIA has grown considerably in reputation, recognition and credibility in the ten years since I left the presidency, largely due to the continuing hard work of Presidents Peterson, Kaihara and Willems."*

*Today IMIA reflects Shires' goal for his presidency in its international constituency, which goes "beyond the Europe-North America-Japan axis to a much greater world vision."*

### **MEDINFO 1983: Amsterdam, The Netherlands**

#### ***Surviving Financial Crisis***

##### ***Hans Peterson, Sweden, IMIA President 1983-1986***

*In 1983, after three years as president elect, Hans Peterson became president of IMIA. "What I remember best", he says, "is that there was no money." Medinfo 83 had diminished already limited funds, and money was simply not available in the*

*amount and at the time that it was needed for Medinfo 86 and subsequent activities. IMIA's officers ended up providing IMIA with free services, from printing and stationery to mailing and telephones.*

*Grants to working conferences were impossible, and IMIA's officers had to spend almost all their time on finances. The final blow came when IMIA closed its permanent secretariat in Amsterdam and its small remaining treasury vanished. The bottom line was "very little time for accomplishments and achievements. The goal was to survive."*

*Now completing his 18th year as national representative for Sweden in 1993, Peterson continues to work for the recognition and acceptance of Medical Informatics. In his view, growing decentralization makes standardization critical. For Peterson, "an international body free from political and governmental influence is absolutely necessary. In this body we have to cooperate also with the industry and get a mutual understanding that cooperation is the only way out."*

### ***MEDINFO 1986: Washington, USA***

## ***Coping with Political Disruption***

### ***Shigekoto Kaihara, Japan, IMIA President 1986-1989***

*From 1986 to 1989 Shigekoto Kaihara confronted problems that were uniquely global. So was the resolution he succeeded in effecting. He had played a key role in accepting a strong proposal from the People's Republic of China for Medinfo. For Kaihara, a Beijing meeting would demonstrate the relevance of Medical Informatics to developing countries as well as to developing nations. The theme of the conference, Informatics in Support of Global Health, reflected both IMIA's intentions and the input of the World Health Organization.*

*As fate would have it, Kaihara was in Beijing in early June, meeting with the Chinese organizing committee, when the world was jolted by the news of the events in Tien-an Men Square. Once back in Japan, he faced faxes from around the world and fears whether "IMIA as an organization would survive." The final resolution was to hold a two-part Medinfo. Medinfo Beijing rewarded the work and the eagerness of its organizing committee, and K.C.Lun applied his extraordinary ability and efficiency in arranging Medinfo Singapore. Both Medinfos succeeded.*

*Also during his term, Kaihara strengthened IMIA's scientific linkages with IFIP and gained administrative independence for IMIA. Today, he believes, "There is no comparable international organization in the field of Medical Informatics."*

### ***MEDINFO 1989: Singapore/Beijing***

## ***Preparing for IMIA's future***

### ***Jos L. Willems, Belgium IMIA President 1989-1992***

*The national representative to IMIA for Belgium since 1978, Jos Willems, accepted the position of IMIA President Elect at Medinfo 86 and served through Medinfo 92 in Geneva, Switzerland.*

*According to Willems as he concluded his term, "The major challenge of the presidency is to keep IMIA's activities going. The major task is to stimulate people. The organization is up to now entirely run by volunteers. IMIA needs a paid Executive Secretary and Secretariat if the organization wants to grow."*

*Among his achievements as President was the publication of the first Yearbook of Medical Informatics for Medinfo 92. This volume was intended to "Stimulate our field and encourage investigators to produce work of high scientific quality and medical relevance." IMIA was also received official recognition as Non-Governmental organization (NGO) to the World Health Organization (WHO).*

*Leaving his office of president, Willems recalled the social activities of the Board with great pleasure and credited IMIA with broadening his professional horizons "as a result of the many international contacts in different continents."*

### **MEDINFO 1992: Geneva, Switzerland**

*1992 Yearbook of Medical Informatics - Advances in an Interdisciplinary Science. Van Bommel, Jan H., McCray, Alexa T., eds.; Schattauer, Stuttgart.*

## **Moving from Theory into Practice**

### **Marion Ball, USA, IMIA President 1992-1995**

*When Marion Ball assumed the presidency in 1992, she came with a new vision set by the IMIA Board in its strategic planning. She was intent upon making IMIA a "bridge" organization with strong ties to other professional associations as well as institutions in healthcare and higher education. To move from theory to practice, she worked with the IMIA Board to launch a new institutional membership category that would strengthen IMIA's ties not only to these groups but also to the vendor and consulting worlds. By mid 1993, there were twenty institutional members eager to participate in events around the globe, from the United States to Japan and in between.*

*One of the first challenges to her presidency came in early 1993, when Brazil was forced by economic and political uncertainties to withdraw as site for Medinfo 95. At the request of the Board, Canada, which had earlier sought the honor of hosting Medinfo, quickly stepped into the breach.*

*As plans for Medinfo moved forward, Ball worked on issues vital to IMIA's future, establishing a stable financial base and a new infrastructure for the new IMIA.*

*Initiatives targeted creating a regional IMIA presence in the Asia Pacific Region (APAMI). Actions were taken to strengthen IMIA working group meetings one of IMIA's enduring and enriching activities by cosponsoring them with other professional and institutional member groups.*

*In her presidency, Ball sought to broaden IMIA's vistas and incorporate new areas of interest by encouraging new working conferences and groups to address such topics as organizational development, health evaluation, pharmaco informatics, technology assessment, clinical computing, and telemedicine.*

## **MEDINFO 1995: Vancouver, Canada**

*1993 Yearbook of Medical Informatics - **Sharing Knowledge and Information**. Van Bommel, Jan H., McCray, Alexa T.; Schattauer, Stuttgart.*

*1994 Yearbook of Medical Informatics - **Advanced Communications in Health Care**. Van Bommel, Jan H., McCray, Alexa T.; Schattauer, Stuttgart.*

*1995 Yearbook of Medical Informatics - **The Computer based Patient Record**. Van Bommel, Jan. H., McCray, Alexa T., Schattauer, Stuttgart.*

## **Towards a Sustainable IMIA Electronic Infrastructure: [www.imia.org](http://www.imia.org)**

### **Otto Rienhoff, Germany, IMIA President 1995 - 1998**

*The change to a global information society has been pushed in many ways by governments and international organisations. As a result various initiatives exist which reflect the mission, purpose, political background, and market interest of the backing institution. Telematics in Health and Telemedicine have been drawing enormous attention modulated by national health care structures and finances. A major achievement of the 8<sup>th</sup> presidency was the establishment of a sustainable electronic infrastructure for IMIA managed by Thomas Kleinoeder. Sustainability in IMIA's context means that the electronic infrastructure had to be set up to serve members with such different resources as isolated persons in Africa and high-tech Universities in the US. It means to establish services which can be financed by IMIA without dependencies on third parties, which guarantee compliance with IMIA's aims, and can cope both with the strong and the weak sides of an international volunteer organisation. It will be the task of the coming years to elaborate this infrastructure and to learn to manage virtual working groups and conferences with it.*

*The definition of the role of an Executive Director for IMIA in the context of a continuous secretarial function was another major achievement. Again the considerations apply as mentioned above. The process reached its first major success with the election of Steve Huesing as IMIA's first Executive Director in the General Assembly 1997 in Sydney. Learning from experiences with the Electronic Services and with MEDINFO '98 in Korea the process for identifying an appropriate candidate for the first full three year term could be started in 1998.*

*The establishment of an African Region (HELINA) was started during the regional conference in Midrand, South Africa in 1996, followed by a French-speaking regional conference in Abidjan in 1998. S. Isaaks, Cape Town, serves as first coordinator.*

## **MEDINFO 1998: Seoul, Korea**

**IMIA Yearbooks:**

*1996 Yearbook of Medical Informatics - **Integration of Information for Patient Care.** Van Bommel, Jan. H., McCray, Alexa T.; Schattauer, Stuttgart.*

*1997 Yearbook of Medical Informatics - **Computing and Collaborative Care.** Van Bommel, Jan. H., McCray, Alexa T.; Schattauer, Stuttgart.*

*1998 Yearbook of Medical Informatics - **Health Informatics and the Internet.** Van Bommel, Jan. H., McCray, Alexa T., Schattauer, Stuttgart.*

***Entering the Twenty-First Century***

***Jan van Bommel, The Netherlands, IMIA President 1998-2001***

***MEDINFO 2001: London, United Kingdom***

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