Editorial

Editor’s annual review

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This has been another very successful year for Informatics in Primary Care. Our collaboration with Radcliffe Publishing goes from strength to strength, and we continue to get more international subscribers to the journal – and indeed members of the Primary Health Care Specialist Group (PHCSG). The content of the journal continues to reflect the wide range of activity in primary care informatics, this year with a particular emphasis on data quality and the information requirements of the new General Medical Services (GMS) contract, but also increasing numbers of papers on electronic communication of health information, either between healthcare providers or with patients, and also consideration of the impact of the computer on the consultation itself.

We have focused on the academic/scientific over the last few years, but we have begun to enhance the more practical, pragmatic side of the journal in addition to the academic content. We have published more international perspectives, and some commented case studies, but would like to see more articles from students on MSc courses in health informatics about work in progress as well as their finished research.

Last year I was able to announce that we had achieved indexing in Index Medicus and its online counterpart, Medline (www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/PubMed). Our inclusion in this service means that the journal has greatly increased exposure throughout the international biomedical community, and we are finding our papers cited in other journals on an increasing basis. The longevity of the research papers published in Informatics is assured around the globe. Following this inclusion, there has been a rapid increase in both quantity and quality of papers submitted for publication in Informatics in Primary Care, and we are increasingly respected as a source of expertise in primary care informatics communities.

It is important for the future development of the journal that we get a continuing volume and variety of papers, articles, case studies, evaluations, news about conferences – please write for Informatics yourself, and encourage your colleagues to do so also.

I would like to thank all the members of the Editorial Board, the Radcliffe Publishing team, all our contributors and our panel of reviewers, as their hard work has made the journal such a success.

Primary care informatics in the future

The NHS across the UK is undergoing immense changes, and informatics is ever more important to enable primary care providers to demonstrate the quality of the care they provide. The implementation across the whole of England, in all health sectors, of the National Programme for Information Technology will bring about unprecedented opportunities for health informaticians – and we know that progress is being closely monitored internationally! Many other countries are implementing or planning to introduce more information technology (IT) into the healthcare environment, but the real benefits will take some time to emerge. The next issue of Informatics will include a report of a one-day consensus conference being held at Medinfo 2004 in San Francisco on the topic ‘What is primary care informatics?’ This event is designed to enable interaction between primary care informatics practitioners from around the world, learning through international experience and participation about the potential for IT to improve healthcare delivery within the primary care sector; exploring uses of IT in the clinical setting, examining the unique role of the primary care clinician, the information needs which exist in primary care practice, and how technology facilitates the care of the patient; and exploring the capacity of IT to collect and analyse population-based healthcare data.

Highlights in this issue

This issue includes a number of new topics for Informatics in Primary Care, reflecting new priorities: the paper from Kittler et al about physicians’ views on...
the web portal designed for online communication with patients (Kittler et al, p.129) shows new ways of using the web to allow patients access to their records, and a new communication modality with their healthcare providers. Such applications are becoming more common around the world, including the UK, with the advent of HealthSpace as part of the National Programme for IT.

We also have two papers on data quality (Onofrei et al, p.139 and de Lusignan et al, p.147) and patient safety (Demiris et al, p.157) – both becoming recurring themes in this journal! – and the importance of education, training and support in improving use of IT tools (Yaghmaie and Jayasuriya, p.163), a topic dear to my heart.