Pharmacy IT Symposium 2008 Reflections
by Allen Flynn, PharmD, CPHIMS, CHS, Symposium Planning Committee Chair

The Pharmacy IT Symposium 2008 at HIMSS Annual Conference & Exhibition was a tremendous success with well over 100 attendees! The symposium theme this year was, “Driving Change and Enhanced Quality, One Prescription at a Time.”

The symposium began with a call to make patient safety, and medication safety in particular, the inspiration for our present efforts in pharmacy informatics. Pat Hale, PhD, MD, FACP discussed in detail the current state of e-Prescribing in the United States, challenging all symposium attendees to participate in three ways. First, publicity is needed. Pharmacy informaticists were asked to become champions of e-Prescribing for its safety and effectiveness benefits. Second, advocacy and legislative alignment is needed to solve known e-Prescribing challenges such as finding a secure and appropriate way to support e-Prescribing of controlled substances, a group of drugs that are absolutely essential in patient care and pain management. Third, refining and adopting standards along with the computer system enhancements to support the standards is needed. HIMSS e-Prescribing Task Force is a great place to get involved in these efforts. Visit http://www.himss.org/ASP/topics_eprescribing.asp to get involved today!

Next, Pharmacy IT Symposium attendees were invited into a joint interdisciplinary session with nurses and physicians on the unintended consequences of combining automation and human workflow. In a fascinating contrast of perspectives Lyle Berkowitz, MD, Paul Conlon, PharmD, JD, Pamela Griffith, RN, MBA and Blackford Middleton, MD, MPH, MSc, provided a unique look at unintended challenges such as accidental, but permanent, electronic health record data losses were balanced with very positive but unanticipated benefits such as improved organizational teaming and togetherness.

After an interdisciplinary networking lunch the Pharmacy IT Symposium reconvened to learn from Thomas Cooley, RPh, MBA about the Closed Loop Medication Use Process that has been instituted successfully at Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston, Massachusetts. This data-rich presentation called all participants to create highly reliable medication use processes supported by information technologies. The point was well made that in pharmacy and medication management, seemingly high rates of accuracy, even greater than 99.9%, are not good enough to prevent frequent medication mishaps.
David Nau, RPh, PhD, CPHQ, gave a fabulously intriguing and powerfully pertinent session on Pay for Performance measures in pharmacy practice. It was pointed out that value-based purchasing in healthcare is becoming a norm and, further, that pharmacy, in all venues, will likely be subject to new quality performance measures with respect to reimbursement. Measures of adherence, frequency of out-of-range dosing and others were discussed in detail giving participants some fascinating take-aways for further contemplation and dialog.

Finally, this year’s closing session was the culmination of HIMSS plan to bring pharmacists and CIOs together in a fun, spirited, patient-centered, participatory dialog about the role of the pharmacist and the importance of optimizing the medication cycle. Lynn Boecler, PharmD, MS, John Hingl, Brian Jacobs, MD and Tom Smith - two Davies Award of Excellence winners shared their views of the collaborative process, tradeoffs and ultimate benefits of working together to achieve documented results in the area of pharmacy informatics. The vital role of the pharmacist was highlighted as the participants described how their goals were met through persistent action in the face of obstacles.

The 3rd Annual Pharmacy IT Symposium at HIMSS was a showcase of new ideas and a forum for thoughtful, forward-looking dialogues. Be sure to attend the 4th HIMSS Annual Pharmacy IT Symposium - April 2009 in Chicago, Illinois so you can share your experience and learn from your colleagues!

We would like to extend a hearty thank you to all the Planning Committee members who made this year’s symposium a success! Also a big thank you to the Pharmacy Informatics Task Force members for their input into this year’s program! To learn more about the Pharmacy Informatics Task Force at HIMSS please visit http://www.himss.org/ASP/topics_pharmacyInformatics.asp today!