

Editorial **Comments**

JAMIA

A Focus on Telehealth

The title and theme of the 1996 AMIA Spring Congress was "Conquering Distance: Teleinformatics, Telemedicine, Telehealth." In her welcoming statement, Betsy Humphreys, co-editor of this issue and Program Chair for the 1996 AMIA Spring Congress, wrote:

High-speed, high band-width access to the Internet is spreading rapidly; the World Wide Web is providing cross-platform integration of text, pictures, and sound; and the technologies supporting telemedicine, informatics, public health, and education are converging. As enhanced communications help us to conquer geographic distance, they provide the opportunity to link informatics, telemedicine, public health and information services in new and powerful ways. This conference explores the links between teleinformatics, telemedicine, and telehealth by focusing on (1) the technologies themselves and practical considerations involved in their use; (2) current teleinformatics, telemedicine, and telehealth applications and the extent to which they integrate access to health data and knowledge-based information; (3) efforts to share and aggregate patient data across networks; and (4) public policy issues, including interstate licensure and privacy.

In this issue of JAMIA, we have attempted to capture the flavor of the Spring Congress. Although the concept of telemedicine, providing health care at a distance, is not a new one, the papers presented at the Spring Congress represented new and often preliminary approaches to this concept that were made pos-

sible by emerging, state-of-the-art, digital communications technologies.

The published Proceedings of the 1996 AMIA Spring Congress comprises the single-page abstracts of the papers that were presented orally at the Congress. Several representative presenters were approached and asked to convert their abstracts and oral presentations into full articles for review and publication in JAMIA. The results are included in this issue's section on Telehealth. For those who were fortunate enough to have attended the Congress, we hope that these papers will serve as a reminder of the ideas we heard and the discussions we had there. For those who missed the Congress, we hope that these papers will serve as a small window into the work being done and the issues that need to be confronted if telemedicine is ever to become a part of the normal practice of medicine.

Betsy and I hope you will enjoy this 1996 AMIA Spring Congress sample and that it will whet your appetite for the 1997 AMIA Spring Conference and its related theme of Community Health Information Systems.

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