



Section of
**PHARMACY INFORMATICS
AND TECHNOLOGY**



Message from the Chair – October, 2011

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Greetings to the membership of the Section,

The past three months' messages noted how (1) software, (2) the language we use to describe software, and, (3) information design, are all important to us as pharmacy informatics practitioners.

Let's shift our focus to what is most important in the highest reaches of our profession. While we may debate the importance of any specific skill or aspect, it is absolutely necessary for all of us to agree on the importance of pharmacy informatics itself.

Why does pharmacy informatics matter?

What gives meaning to our practice of pharmacy informatics? What is the value of pharmacy informatics for society? Why should we develop the domain of pharmacy informatics?

Our Section membership needs wise and ready answers about our professional mission when asked about our *dual call* to practice both pharmacy and informatics.

We are all grateful to the founders of our Section for establishing pharmacy informatics within the context of the profession of pharmacy. Pharmacy serves patients to achieve the safest and most effective use of drugs. ASHP's Statement on the Pharmacist's Role in Informatics says that pharmacy informaticians, "use their knowledge of information systems and the medication-use process to improve patient care by ensuring that new technologies lead to safer and more effective medication use."¹

Further, all pharmacists are also medication technologists. Pharmacy has helped society move technologically from snake-oil cure-alls to life-saving anti-venoms.² In pharmacy we are accustomed to managing drugs and dosage forms as highly complex technologies.

¹ [ASHP statement on the pharmacist's role in informatics](#). American Journal of Health-System Pharmacy. 64.2 (Jan. 15, 2007) p200

² FDA approves the first specific treatment for scorpion stings, August 3, 2011, At: <http://www.fda.gov/NewsEvents/Newsroom/PressAnnouncements/ucm266611.htm>

For pharmacy informaticians, *safety must remain paramount* in our collective practice so long as the medication-use process is manifestly unsafe.³ While improving safety, we can also improve efficacy and outcomes by getting the right information to the correct decision-maker at the proper moment in a usable form.

To address informatics specifically, we are called to extend our practice beyond pharmacy to (a) assure the wisest, most humane use of information, and, (b) provide automation to make more time for necessary patient-caregiver relationships.

The humane use of information begins with privacy and security. Just as we do with drugs, we respect the power of health information to heal *and to harm*. We are called to lead others in our compliance with protected health information security best practices in a world where it is easier to cut-n-paste than ‘encrypt-n-audit.’

Using automation and information technology to make the process of providing care more efficient is a great challenge. Too often the use of information tools becomes our endpoint, even as the tools themselves are inadequate and distracting. When this happens, we defer the promise of recouping caregiver time and forfeit many intended patient care improvements. Our role in pharmacy informatics is to apply our talents to achieve the promise of saved time and deliver full value from our information tools.

In his book, *Devices of the Soul*, author Steve Talbott wrote, “The fact is that our social future will be determined by the human qualities of the activities being mediated through hundreds of millions of programmed devices, and by our ability consciously to resonate with and thereby to recognize these qualities.”⁴

As pharmacists we have humanized drugs in the past by sharing insights, listening, advising and caring for patients. We will humanize healthcare information technology similarly with wise, pragmatic, elegant, patient-focused work that consciously recognizes and promotes the human qualities of the caregiver-patient relationship.

Pharmacy informatics matters because the promise of safer, more effective, efficient and properly informed pharmaceutical care offered directly by pharmacists to their patients through sustained caregiver relationships is the necessary and intended future of pharmacy practice.

Please share your thoughts and insights on the importance of pharmacy informatics with me at ajflynn@med.umich.edu.

³ [Medication Errors – Incidence Rates](#), Appendix C, Preventing Medication Errors – Quality Chasm Series (2007), IOM

⁴ Talbott, Steve, [Devices of the Soul: Battling for Our Selves in and Age of Machines](#), O’Reilly Media, 2007, p. 28.