



Message from the Chair – September, 2011

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Dear Colleagues,

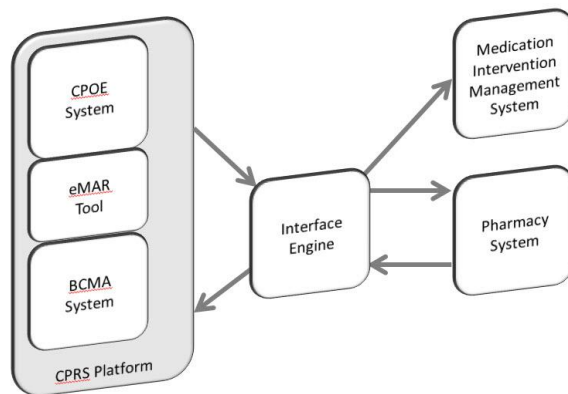
Greetings human factors! As summer turns to fall, I hope your usability is outstanding and all of your information has excellent interpretability!

Seriously, the near meaninglessness of the salutation above is a reminder of how precision in the use of fashionable terms is critical to our success in pharmacy informatics. (But that was the point of last month's missive.)

For this month's installment on software studies, I would like to challenge us all on how well we *present* pharmacy information as outputs from systems, online or otherwise.

Consider the discipline of Information Design. Sometimes the design of information is difficult to perceive in part because its design can be unconscious, assumed or overlooked. In an important book of essays on the subject edited by Jacobson, the discipline of *information design* is defined as, "the art and science of preparing information so that it can be used by human beings with efficiency and effectiveness" – [Horn, p. 15.](#)¹

I assert that the practice of pharmacy informatics must involve the discipline of information design. In our work we *prepare* information. We design the pharmacy information on dispensing labels, in medication alert dialog boxes and onscreen. Think of TALLman lettering but don't stop there. We have more work to do together in pharmacy information design. We must challenge ourselves to create improved information designs for labels, alerts, reports, tables and graphics.



We should consider the primary graphics tools

¹ Jacobson, R. "Information Design", MIT Press, 1999.
http://books.google.com/books/about/Information_design.html?id=vnax4nN4Ws4C

described by Hansen as a painter would consider the primary colors.² Hansen's five primary graphics tools are Circles, Squares, Triangles, Lines and Fuzz (scribbles). They are best used in combination! Following Hansen's lead, we should not be afraid to draw when describing pharmacy informatics concepts. Graphics are part of our information design toolkit. At my site, we have just integrated a bar code scanning component. In so doing we sought to understand potential failure modes to plan for downtime. Here is a graphic that has helped my team to understand impacts and options.

Achieving elegant information design can be a matter of applying design principles and concepts that are known thanks to the work of experts like Dr. Edward Tufte. If you have not had a chance to evaluate the teachings of Dr. Tufte on information design, you will be delighted by his work. See www.edwardtufte.com for more (well-designed) information.

In this regard, the Section offers grateful thanks to the Institute for Safe Medication Practices (ISMP) for their work on pharmacy information design. To review ISMP's collected wisdom on pharmacy label information design, check out <http://www.ismp.org/tools/guidelines/labelFormats/>.

The Section requires your feedback on pharmacy information design and how it relates to our practice of pharmacy informatics.

Our Section congratulates incoming Chair-Elect, Kevin Marvin and incoming Director-at-Large, Gwen Volpe. We all look forward to collaborating with you in your new [Section leadership](#) positions!

Special thanks to Karl Gumpper of ASHP and Leslie Mackowiak at Vandy for keeping our Section updated and plugged-in to the important work of the Pharmacy e-Health Information Technology Collaborative (www.pharmacyhit.org). All Section members are encouraged to review the collaborative's website. The Section gratefully recognizes the pioneering efforts of [Shelley Spiro](#), RPh, FASCP who is gathering the intelligence and building the connections our profession requires within the healthcare IT interoperability landscape. She is leading pharmacy's expedition of this territory with tenacity, foresight and acumen reminiscent of the United States' continental pathfinders, Lewis and Clark.

Write me at ajflynn@med.umich.edu and let me know your thoughts about pharmacy software, pharmacy informatics terminology and pharmacy information design.

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For more information about the Section of Pharmacy Informatics and Technology, please visit our website at www.ashp.org/informatics.

² Hanson, YM, "Visualization for Thinking, Planning and Problem Solving", in "Information Design" ed. Jacobson, R. "Information Design", MIT Press, 1999.