

NEWS RELEASE

National Study Reveals Metrics on HI and HIM Labour and Skills Shortages

Partners Stress the Immediate Need for a Human Resource Strategy

TORONTO, ON (November 2, 2009) - A landmark economic study, *Health Informatics and Health Information Management – Human Resources Report*, identifies a serious need for increased labour and skills among Canadian Health Information (HI) and Health Information Management (HIM) professionals over the next five years. Key findings in the report, presented during the Fall 2009 *Infoway* Partnership Conference, are:

- Approximately 32,450 HI and HIM professionals are currently working in Canada.
- An additional 6,320 to 12,330 HI and HIM professionals are needed by 2014, primarily due to the growing investment and adoption of electronic health information systems (EHIS).
- Current vacancy rates of over 10 per cent exist for six of the 27 occupational groups studied.
- HI and HIM professionals who require broader skills will increase from 8,880 in 2009 to between 13,690 and 32,170 by 2014.

The requirement for HI and HIM professionals to acquire broader skills (additional knowledge, practical insight and enhanced experience beyond their original training) is driven by the implementation of large-scale investments in new EHIS technologies. The demand for training to meet these requirements exceeds the resources that professional associations are currently able to offer.

Five national organizations that play key roles in supporting the implementation of EHIS technologies in Canada have partnered on this important research to develop an evidence-based foundation from which a human resource strategy can be built. These partners include: Canadian Health Information Management Association (CHIMA), COACH : Canada's Health Informatics Association, Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), ITAC Health: the Health Division of the Information Technology Association of Canada, and Canada Health Infoway.

"This study provides real metrics to substantiate the fears and views of our health partners in both the public and private sector that the successful implementation of EHIS systems is jeopardized due to the lack of qualified human resources," states Don Newsham, Co-Chair of the Study Steering Committee and Chief Executive Officer of COACH: Canada's Health Informatics Association. "Furthermore, this is a wake-up call that we need to devise strategies to address the skills gap."

The study provides three recommendations:

1. **A national initiative to monitor the human resource implications of implementing EHIS**, such as: HI and HIM employment numbers; capital spending on EHIS technologies; IT spending within the healthcare sector; and enrolment and graduation rates in post-secondary institutions that offer HI and HIM programs.
2. **An ongoing forecast of HI and HIM human resource requirements** supported by expert consultations, strengthened data sources, and systematic industry validation.
3. **The formulation of strategies to address skills shortages** including: strengthening the capacity of professional associations to develop and deliver professional development training; expanding the role of skill certification by building on certification programs that are already in place; expanding co-op and internship programs to accelerate the integration of recent graduates into the HI and HIM professional work force; and, strengthening efforts to more effectively integrate internationally trained HI & HIM professionals.

“Now that we know the size and seriousness of the skills and labour shortage, we will need to act collaboratively and quickly to devise a comprehensive human resource strategy to address the issue,” says Paul Swinwood, Co-Chair of the Study Steering Committee and Executive Director of the Information and Communication Technology Council (ICTC). “There is a real risk that the substantial investments that our governments are making in EHIS technologies will not deliver the promised benefits unless we address this human resource issue effectively.”

For a complete copy of the report, go to www.ictc-ctic.ca.

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