

Newsletter

SUMMER 2008 ISSUE 10

Welcome to Issue 10 of the NCRI Informatics Initiative Newsletter

The 5th caBIG™ Annual Meeting was held in Washington D.C. between the 23-25 June. The meeting brought together representatives of biomedical grid initiatives from the US, Europe and beyond, and demonstrated how collaboration and cooperation is boosting the success of such endeavours. The Informatics Initiative was represented on the panel discussions 'Enabling International Interoperability' and 'caBIG™ Case Studies Involving Collaboration Between Imaging and Tissue Banking and Pathology Tools Workspaces' as well as through a poster presentation on the joint Imaging and Pathology collaboration between NCRI and NCI. The high profile awarded to the Initiative during the caBIG™ Meeting reinforces the strength of collaboration between NCRI and NCI. The meeting also proved to be a success in terms of discussing future progress

on joint initiatives, such as the identification of appropriate data standards for the scientific research community.

The NCRI/NCI Joint Conference, 'Biomedical Informatics without Borders', will also be held in Washington D.C. between 2-3 September of this year. This conference hopes to build on the success of the inaugural Joint Conference which was held in London last year. The object of these is to build relationships and foster productive collaboration in the cancer research informatics field. This year the programme focuses on the themes of: international collaboration, interoperability, and standards.

A link to the conference website can be found on the Informatics homepage.

We hope you enjoy this issue!

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:



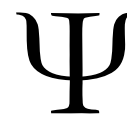
SPECIAL FEATURE

Consumer
Representative



UNIT ACTIVITIES

Industry Summit



MEETING UPDATE

HUPO
Proteomics
Standards
Initiative

UNIT NEWS

New Starters

If you have any queries or comments on any article in our newsletter, or would like to contribute to the next issue, please contact us at:

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info@cancerinformatics.org.uk

SPECIAL FEATURE

Consumer Member

We are delighted to welcome a new consumer member to the NCRI Informatics Board.

Julie Clifton was appointed in March of this year to help us make sure that, whatever we are doing, we always remember that our primary goal is to improve the services available to people with cancer.

Julie brings her own recent experience as a cancer patient, as well as extensive experience in managing healthcare information in the NHS. She has worked for over twenty years in NHS IT, initially for a major IT systems supplier, then as a Trust and Health Authority IT Director and, for the last five years, at national level for the NHS National Programme for IT.

After attending her first meeting in April Julie said:

“...I’ve got a huge amount to learn before I fully understand the business of the board, but I hope that I will be able to bring a useful and practical perspective from my own experience both as a cancer patient and as someone who has worked closely with healthcare information systems. From a work perspective I understand the challenges of collecting, storing and using clinical information and, as a patient, I know how difficult it can be to deal with both giving and receiving information as you undergo treatment.”

Julie is keen to ensure that the views of patients are considered at every stage of managing information, how it’s collected in the clinical setting, how it’s stored and how it’s used.

“...The opportunities that we now have to disseminate and share information offer amazing opportunities to help us understand the causes of cancer and how best to prevent, detect and treat it. Using the information effectively will be vital in winning the battle against the disease. However as we collect more and more information, and share it ever more widely we must always bear in mind the individual patient at the heart of the service and their right to expect their confidentiality to be respected. We need to think about all of the implications of sharing information on patients and those who care for them.”

Julie is also keen to support patients in accessing good quality information to help them understand their own condition and the options for treatment. Informatics is often seen as a very technical area and not something that patients and lay people can be involved in and influence. But as the science of informatics increases in importance in the battle against cancer we need to make sure that patients and other people affected by cancer understand the importance of giving information whilst understanding how that information will be used and how their confidentiality will be maintained, and can understand the impact that their part in research has made.

Having given information to support research, patients will want to know that it is being used to deliver the maximum benefit, but stored and used in a way that protects its subject. Patients want all of the partners that are working to improve cancer services to collaborate to get the best possible outcomes.

Julie is also keen to ensure that the Board gets the best advice possible from patients and other service users.

“...It isn’t enough to involve just a small handful of patients and assume that their views reflect the views of all patients. We need to go further, firstly in making sure that groups representing the interests of patients understand the importance of developments in informatics, and then working with them to consider the impact that these developments can and will have on patient services.”

In order to start this process the Informatics Team have agreed to work with Julie on a presentation to the National Consumer Group where we hope to raise the level of interest in informatics amongst patient representatives. We have also set up an email address for Julie so that anybody interested in the role of patients involvement in informatics can ask questions and raise comments. If you have anything that you’d like to ask, please drop her a line at julie.clifton@ncri.org.uk.



Julie Clifton
Consumer Representative

UNIT ACTIVITIES

Industry Summit

On 22nd February 2008, the Informatics Initiative brought together senior representatives from leading pharmaceutical companies; experts from the NHS and academia; and the NCRI Informatics Coordination Unit (ICU).

The aim of the Summit was to explore an approach to R & D information that could embrace both industry and academia in the 'pre-competitive' space.

Professor Sir Alex Markham spoke about the challenge and the opportunity that the scientific and clinical cancer field faces with respect to the prodigious output of data from cancer research. He explained that the NCRI Informatics Initiative was leading the way in the UK to improve access to data, increase the value of in-house data, reduce costs.

Six speakers highlighted progress in maximising the value of data and the benefits of informatics that will be achieved in the near future. These included presentations from Dr Ken Buetow on the caBIG™ initiative; Mr Chris Carrigan on the National Cancer Intelligence

Network; Professor Ian Diamond on electronic patient records and Professor Phil Quirke on the use of informatics to facilitate the use of imaging in pathology.

Dr. Tim French, Associate Director, Discovery Medicine, AstraZeneca, chaired a group discussion session on the approaches being taken by individual companies, their perceptions on unmet needs and what they would like to see achieved. The attendees then took part in smaller group discussions to identify common issues that the NCRI Informatics Initiative would be able to assist industry with. Dr French commented that:

"...Informatics challenges such as access to patient records and data standardisation consistently emerged from independent group discussions highlighting the significant value to be realised for both industry and academia though coordinated programmes of data sharing."

There was a consensus that the ICU could play a useful, ongoing role in bringing companies together, at an international as well as UK level.

Professor Sir Mike Brady, University of Oxford, informed the audience that the academic community was keen to engage with the Informatics Initiative. He illustrated this by summarising 37 outline proposals for potential cancer informatics

projects that covered a broad range of areas from genomics, to standards development, to epidemiology. These outline proposals were received in response to a call put out by the Informatics Initiative and had been reviewed by the NCRI Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel.

The meeting provided a wealth of opportunities for engagement with industry on a variety of levels. These included options for collaboration on research projects and the opportunity to explore pre-competitive areas whilst demonstrating the benefits of data sharing and the adoption of common standards.

Subsequent to the Summit, follow-up contact with the pharmaceutical industry clearly indicates an enthusiasm about the potential of working with the Informatics Initiative on areas of mutual benefit. A number of potential collaborative projects are currently under discussion and the ICU is actively pursuing these new opportunities.

The Informatics Initiative continues to welcome outline proposals for collaborative projects via its call for Expressions of Interest, which can be found on its website.

For more information about the summit and the expressions of interest please contact Victoria Saint: Victoria.Saint@ncri.org.uk.



The Industry Summit was hosted by NCRI Informatics at the Novartis Foundation in London.

MEETING UPDATE

Proteomics Standards

A report on the HUPO-PSI Spring Meeting, Toledo, Spain, April 23-25 2008.

The Human Proteome Organisation (HUPO) proteomics standards initiative (PSI), formed in 2002, aims to develop community-wide standards for the capture and sharing of proteomics data including reporting requirements, data exchange formats, detailed controlled vocabulary terms and to generate open source tools and reference database implementation. It also organises two free-to-attend meetings per year that bring together bioinformaticians, developers, software providers and instrument vendors amongst others interested in participating in the development of current standards.

This year's Spring meeting had as a backdrop the beautiful city of Toledo and was hosted by ProteoRed (a Spanish National Network for coordination, integration and development of Proteomics Facilities).

After the welcoming, introductory and activities overview sessions in the morning of the first day, the meeting split into 4 concurrent sessions on: sample processing and separations, mass spectrometry, proteomics informatics and molecular interactions,

while common sessions brought everyone together at the end of the first and last days to address popular topics of shared interest.

One of the most interesting plenary presentations was given by Chris Taylor (EBI) on Minimum Information (MI) standards consolidation in various domains in the life sciences. The Minimum Information for Biological and Biomedical Investigations (MIBBI - <http://www.mibbi.org/>) is a web-based communal resource designed through its key components (the "Portal" and the "Foundry") to: act as a one-stop shop for those exploring the range of extant projects on minimum reporting guidelines through the "Portal" and promote gradual integration of MI standards by direct community participation through the "Foundry".

During the breakout sessions, participants were busy working on draft documents and implementation issues, apart from the session on Molecular Interactions (chaired by: Henning Hermjakob, EBI). With the minimum reporting guidelines for molecular interactions (MIMIX) published in Nature Biotechnology last August as well as a published data exchange format (MIF) and a controlled vocabulary (PSI-MI v2.5) under dynamic maintenance, this session focused on standards-compliant resources and databases. The growing efforts of the International Molecular Exchange

Consortium (IMEX – <http://imex.sourceforge.net/>), a group of major molecular interaction providers sharing curation effort and exchanging complete records on molecular interaction data in PSI compliant manner, were also presented.

Although the development of proteomic standards is well underway with the remarkable efforts of the HUPO-PSI community, it is important that a good 'marketing' strategy is put into place so that the fruits of their effort reach well beyond their immediate community

For more information please visit:

<http://www.psidev.info/>

UNIT NEWS

New Starters

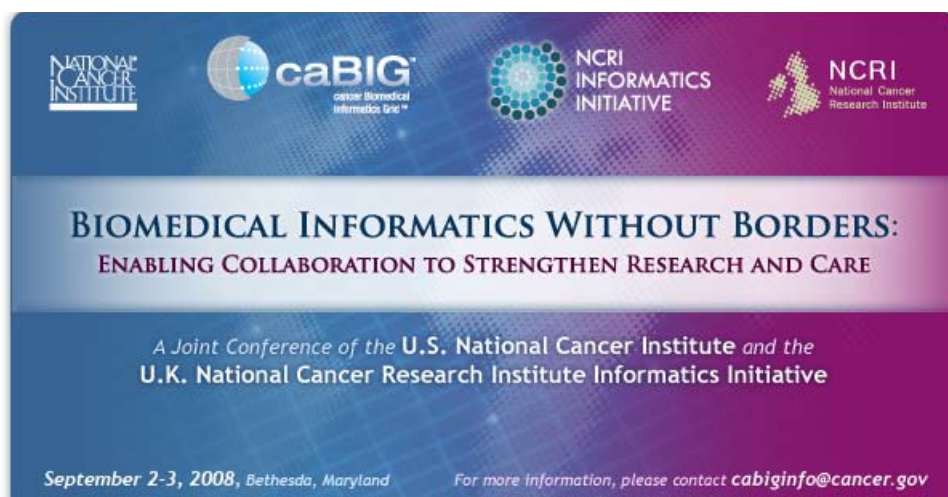
SLAWOMIR (EDWARD) ZUKOWSKI

Mr Zukowski joined the NCRI Informatics Initiative as an IT Analyst in the Platform Development group where he works on a grid-based data sharing and integration project. Prior to this, he has worked for over 10 years in software engineering for both large government-funded projects as well as start-up companies. He specialises in object oriented programming and design and has gained an MSc in Bioinformatics from Imperial College London.

SEE WAH CHENG

Mr Cheng joined the NCRI Informatics Initiative as an IT Analyst. Since graduating from Cambridge University with a BA in Computer Science, he has worked in different software companies, focusing on designing and implementing complex software projects for a variety of clients ranging from financial institutions to governmental bodies. He is an advocate of agile software development methods.

Save the date in September!



The banner features logos for the National Cancer Institute, caBIG (cancer Biomedical Informatics Grid), NCRI Informatics Initiative, and the NCRI National Cancer Research Institute. The main text reads: "BIOMEDICAL INFORMATICS WITHOUT BORDERS: ENABLING COLLABORATION TO STRENGTHEN RESEARCH AND CARE". Below this, it states: "A Joint Conference of the U.S. National Cancer Institute and the U.K. National Cancer Research Institute Informatics Initiative". At the bottom, it provides the date "September 2-3, 2008, Bethesda, Maryland" and the contact information "For more information, please contact cabinfo@cancer.gov".

For more information and a full programme please go to:
<https://cabig.nci.nih.gov/nci-ncri2008conference>

In the next issue...

Update on the NCI's
5th caBIG™ Annual Meeting
in Washington, DC.