

A History of Health Informatics in the Texas Medical Center

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Abstract: *The TMC History project documents the history of informatics in the Texas Medical Center (TMC) and present it as a Web-based information resource that can be an adjunct to the education of graduate students in the health informatics program.*

Background: The Texas Medical Center (TMC) in Houston is the world's largest medical center¹ with 42 member institutions comprising of 12 hospitals and 11 academic and research institutions including two medical schools, catering to virtually all health-related careers². Rice University is next door. With its sixty years of history in healthcare, the TMC provides a rich context of medical practice and research³. Threads of informatics run all through this experience. In 1998 a formal program was created with an academic focus on health informatics in the School of Health Information Sciences (SHIS).

Health Informatics graduate students in the SHIS program, arrive from different places in the US and abroad with a limited understanding of the local history and resources available in the TMC. Informatics is an applied field. Efforts at automation in the TMC provide a wealth of practical experiences. These experiences are not all published and reside with the participants and as such are relatively inaccessible.

Therefore, the authors initiated a process of abstracting the *History of informatics in TMC* into a form useful to the students of informatics and informatics professionals. It is intended to be a resource to guide students to their own interaction with other professionals in the TMC.

Methodology: A comprehensive model for the *History of informatics in TMC* was created to guide the collection of pertinent history. This included creation of a list of various institutions in TMC and short descriptions about each of them describing their history in terms of clinical information systems and network topologies. Various informatics projects and their timelines were identified and lists of people who were the driving force and major participants in these projects were compiled after searching through the literature available online and by word of mouth.

Selected individuals were then approached to participate in interviews. The interviews were semi-structured, carried out in person or by telephone and

were recorded in audio or video format that was subsequently transcribed and abstracted. The results were composed into a structured text in the form of a website. The website was created using Microsoft FrontPage and posted on the SHIS server.

The open-ended structure of the website acknowledges that we have just scratched the surface, but have created a relatively comprehensive outline. It is intended that others can easily pursue further interviews and provide the results to fit into this history. Special topics that arose from interviews fit in as short essays with linkages to the interviews and individuals.

Results: The *History of informatics in TMC* was compiled after interviewing resource persons who were driving force in implementing various projects and was presented as a website. The initial participants in the interviews spoke with enthusiasm and the authors pursued the first elements of the history with keen interest.

The flexible structure of hyperlinked information provides an excellent format for presenting the information, crossreferencing it via internal links and indexing via external links existing sources on the web.

Future goals: *History of informatics in TMC* is designed to be an ongoing process as the authors or others add to the content within the overall structure of the knowledge index. The authors recommend that more interviews and additional web search be done to encompass additional history.

References

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