

Media Release - HISO guides the way for health information standards

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More consistent standards for the electronic use of health information would transform the sector, according to Health Information Standards Organisation (HISO) Chair Paul Cressey.

And the good news, he says, is that it's only a matter of time before this happens. HISO was set up in 2003 to champion, endorse and help develop health information standards. It endorsed its first standard earlier this year on the collection and recording of ethnicity data, and currently has an expert committee working on the data element standards for the proposed Health Provider Index. Another HISO expert committee is standardising international LOINC (laboratory codes) for use in New Zealand.

As the next priority HISO is also talking to the sector about referral and discharge standards. 'Although a lot of work has already been done on discharge and referral standards, HISO aims to bring a common focus to the initiative.'

Currently HISO is also working with ACC and Standards New Zealand to develop a proposal that will see the development of standards for general practice management systems.

Paul, a pharmacist by profession, has long been passionate about the value standards bring to the sector – in fact as early as the 1980s he helped develop information standards for pharmacists. His other roles (he is also chair of Auckland's independent practitioners association East Health, deputy chair of Counties Manukau DHB and chair of the Health Intranet Governance Body) help him maintain an overview of the sector. This overview has shown him that although progress is inevitable, standards are necessary to maintain clear direction.

'One day soon we will have an environment where hospitals, pharmacies, doctors, nurses, primary and secondary providers are all able to easily – and electronically – link with each other to exchange, access and view a wide range of information. Standards are vital to that mix.'

So what is a standard? Paul explains that standards can relate to information, infrastructure or business process.

'Information could be the way we use codes to describe something. Good examples would be laboratory codes (LOINC), ethnicity or the Health Provider Index, which all need to refer to information in a consistent way.

'Infrastructure includes messaging – that is, the way we put together information that we send electronically so that the system sending it and the system receiving it can both understand it. A good example of infrastructure is referrals and discharges or the existing "Health Network Code of Practice" standard, which details the security policies, encryption, system management, and governance of a secure electronic network.

'Business process relates to a defined health activity such as pharmacy or laboratory services, which could be defined and subsequently implemented as a standard. A pharmacy or laboratory business process standard would also include information and infrastructure standards.'

With so much going on in the sector, Paul believes HISO provides an invaluable framework for systematically looking across the sector at what is required to champion the develop of standards.

'HISO's role is to keep a finger on the pulse, find out who's doing what, and then assist in

providing leadership and assistance in the development of standards so that the efforts and enthusiasm of all in the health information sector are maximised to make a real difference in the delivery of health care for the people of New Zealand.'