

Alberta Doctors' Digest

Driving digital health transformation

Behind every patient-physician interaction, chart, and lab result lies something less visible but equally essential: the flow of digital information, called "informatics".

That's where the AMA's Informatics Advisory Committee (AIC) comes in. While this board advisory committee is comprised of members who represent various sections and contribute diverse perspectives, they share a passion for digital health solutions that benefit physicians and patients equally.

"As physicians, everything we do is based on information, data and communication," says Dr. Cassie Millar, family physician and chair of the Informatics Committee. "We need a digital health care ecosystem that is comprehensive, interconnected and reliable for us to be able to provide quality patient care. It's this vision that underpins everything the committee does."

The breadth of the committee's work is vast

From improving how information flows between hospitals and family doctors to preventing lost lab results, their hands and minds touch some of the most critical digital health initiatives in the province, including Connect Care, e-lab ordering, e-referrals and more.

But this isn't a tech team working behind closed doors. Informatics Committee members are practicing physicians who advocate across the provincial health system, sitting on governance tables and influencing policies and initiatives that shape the day-to-day realities of patient care.

"Advocacy is one of the biggest things we do, and we do it through influence and relationships," says Dr. Heidi Fell, AMA Health Informatics Medical Director and a family physician.

"It's important to have a voice in decisions so we can avoid issues for physicians and patients and help ensure policies and technologies work for clinical workflows. Informatics contributes either positively or negatively to physician well-being and the quality of care that patients receive."

A key driver for quality informatics is inter-operability

Inter-operability is the ability for different systems and providers to access and exchange data seamlessly. When data doesn't flow smoothly, physicians spend valuable time searching for patient information across various providers and systems – a task Dr. Fell says can occupy up to 25% of her time as a family physician. And when data is not accessible or gets lost, the patient care impacts can be significant.

“We want clinicians to have all the patient information they need at their fingertips without having to dig for it across multiple systems,” Dr. Millar says. “Digital charts and information should follow patients at every touchpoint so we as physicians can spend more time with patients.”

The committee has had a hand in many successful digital health initiatives over the last few decades. Dr. Fell points to the Connect Care results routing work as a recent achievement.

“Labs and results didn’t reliably get back to the ordering doctor at first,” she says of the initial Connect Care launch. “We’ve made it much more reliable now. There used to be a lot of duplication, and we’ve drastically reduced that. Family docs now get discharge summaries and emergency department reports for their patients. That took years of advocacy.”

And the committee played a significant role in the successful launch and adoption of [CII/CPAR](#), which allows patient information to flow between members of a patient’s care team while confirming the relationship between a patient and their family physician. The result is improved continuity of care with providers having all the information they need look after patients.

“Everyone always assumed that your family doctor automatically gets your hospital information if you are admitted,” Dr. Millar notes. “But it didn’t. Now, we’ve caught up. That foundational piece is in place.”

As the digital health landscape continues to evolve, the Informatics Committee remains a driving force that helps bridge gaps between technology and clinical care. They’re improving physician workflows, bolstering patient care and building a more connected, responsive health system for practitioners and patients alike – one initiative at a time.