

Preface

The Medical and Health Internet, today and tomorrow

Our understanding of Health and progress in Medical Science have resulted in vast quantities of information, now available to researchers and the public through the Internet. The sheer volume, but also the quality and sensitive nature of this information give rise to a multitude of issues being discussed by actors from many disciplines. MEDNET 2003 is an international meeting bringing together researchers, developers and users of applications of the Internet in Medicine, hosted this year in Geneva by Health On the Net Foundation (HON). MedNet 2003 is also the 8th Annual World Congress on the Internet and Medicine of the Society for the Internet in Medicine. This year, MedNet will be held from 4–7 December, to coincide with the World Summit on the Information Society (10–12 December), of which it is an official event. MedNet 2003 hopes to complement the work of the Summit, addressing global health information issues from an ‘information society’ perspective, as reflected in this year’s theme: Internet in Health for All.

In just a few years, the annual MedNet congress has become the focal point for developers and users of the medical internet, and this year in addition, leaders from Government, Industry and Civil Society will be looking on as they gather to set the agenda for tomorrow’s information society.

The World Summit on the Information Society will be held under the patronage of United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, with ITU in the lead role. The first phase will be held in Geneva 10–12 December 2003 and the second phase in Tunis in 2005. The Summit began as an initiative of the 1998 ITU Plenipotentiary Conference, when it was recognized that the gap between information “haves” and “have-nots” was increasing while, at the same time, telecommunications were playing an increasingly important role at the political, economic, social and cultural level.

The Summit must look beyond technology and focus on applications. “The issue is not just to find a way to provide more computers or more telephones, but to extend access to information, to focus on how ICTs can be used to achieve broader social and economic goals, such as the eradication of poverty.” Mr Utsumi noted that this could only be achieved if governments, UN agencies, NGOs and civil society make a commitment to work together. The civil society, including the private sector, are driving forces bringing diversity and hands-on experience to development issues and technological challenges, and is a key player in the information society. It is a duty of all of us, working together with states, to lay the foundations so that all citizens may benefit from ICTs.

The theme, “Internet in Health for All”, emphasizes Internet-based medical and health applications for citizens, patients, medical practitioners and researchers in developing countries as well as in wealthier nations. Principal topics are: access to health and medical information; trustworthiness, security and legal issues with online medical information; online health information and the consumer; and international cooperation in Internet medicine.

In the context of WSIS, this conference will be an opportunity for participants to contribute to the discussions on policy and implementation and share knowledge with actors from the medical Internet community, including non-governmental, educational, not-for-profit and commercial organizations.

A special half-day session will be devoted to sharing the ideas, experience and vision of MEDNET participants with the public.

HON Foundation is a nongovernmental organization in consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). HON introduced the first code of ethical conduct for medical and health information on the Internet, the HONcode, in 1996.

MEDNET is an opportunity to review recent developments and meet the innovators responsible, to reflect on ten years of the Web and how it has changed the world, and to look ahead to bringing the benefits of new information technologies to communities around the world. MEDNET welcomes participants from the many disciplines, which together have made the Internet an important new tool for the promotion of health. We also expect participation from professionals not directly involved in the development of technologies, including medical librarians, educators, writers and publishers, as well as representatives of government, industry and civil society organizations.

In all, some 115 contributions were received for peer review, of which 68 oral presentations, 20 posters and six workshops were selected for the Conference. The proceedings will be published in the *International Journal of Healthcare Engineering, Technology and Health Care*.

MEDNET will provide all participants with interesting and valuable networking opportunities, in addition to the official program of this unique annual state-of-the-art meeting on health and medical internet applications, which is the specificity of MedNet.

The MEDNET 2003 congress is dedicated to the memory of Prof. Jean-Raoul Scherrer, founder of HON, visionary pioneer of Medical Informatics, memory which inspired us to invent practical solutions focusing on real world need as expressed by the users.

The organizers of MedNet 2003 are also grateful for the cooperation of the Geneva Department of Health and Social Services (Direction Générale de la Santé, Département de l'Action Sociale et de Santé – DASS – République et canton de Genève, Switzerland), the University Hospitals of Geneva, and the Office of the Delegate of the Swiss Federal Council for the WSIS.

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