

Canadian Health Computer Drivers Licence Concept Paper

Numerous studies and experience have shown that it takes much more than a good computer system to create a successful information technology solution. Millions of dollars are spent on projects that failed, not necessarily because the technology was inadequate, but because the human resources were not able to learn/adapt/change etc. No where is this more true than in health care. One only has to reflect on the significant investments that have been made in the development and deployment of provider order entry systems with their appallingly low rate of use and subsequent little return on investment.

Recent research (Rigby) in the UK has noted that the typical end user of clinical health systems is different from the end users of systems in other industries such as insurance, banking, travel, etc. This is primarily due to the role of technology. In other industries, the information system is the primary component of daily activity. In healthcare, the end users have primarily a clinical function and that, while important, the system represents a small part of their daily routine.

“In Europe, the European Computer Drivers License (ECDL) has gained wide recognition as a generic qualification for users of computer systems in all sectors and industries, aimed at giving basic competencies to users who are not informatics professionals.” (www.ecdl.com) As well, it is noted that significant reduction in support costs have been achieved in organizations where this standard has been adopted. “Research undertaken with a pilot at Manchester Health Agency found that staff who have achieved the ECDL save approximately half an hour a day through not struggling with technology. At the same time, 96 per cent of the Manchester users who had completed the ECDL said that they now rarely need to call IT support departments, compared to 71 per cent who did so regularly before achieving the standard”. (www.vnunet.com/News)

Plans are now underway to augment the concept of the ECDL with the addition of a health supplement. Development is underway in the European Community to identify the electronic health data handling competencies for patient care staff that would be portable between systems and jobs. (Rigby)

In Canada, through government initiatives and Canada Health Infoway significant investments in IT projects are being made with the view to expedite the realization of an Electronic Health Record in this country. And while the investment in technology is required to improve the efficient and effectiveness of the health system, there has been little effort to develop a strategy for building the competency and knowledge required of the health care workforce, to not only use, but to embrace the technology. “...Individuals require skills and knowledge in health informatics to appropriately handle health data and interact with health information technology”. (Bukeridge)

A number of healthcare IT individuals have expressed an interest in developing a strategy for adoption of a qualification similar to the ECDL for Canadian health care practitioners. This paper is meant to serve as a catalyst to begin a dialogue about how this might be realized. Your comments, opinions and ideas are welcome.

For further information, please contact:

Lisa Meginbir
Program Head, Health Informatics
B.C. Institute of Tehnology
Email: lisa_meginbir@bcit.ca
1-800-663-6542 ext 4011 or 604-453-4011