Background
The AFMC Informatics Resource Group (or IRG), previously known as the Medical Informatics Resource Group, has gradually coalesced from the work of a number of individuals attending the annual meeting who were interested in pursuing collaborations between schools in the area of technology-mediated education. It has been recognized as a resource group of the AFMC and now involves participants from all AFMC affiliate organizations. Originally led by Dr David Fleiszer from McGill and more recently Dr Ben Chen from Queens the current Chair, Dr Rachel Ellaway from NOSM, took up the position in 2008.

Annual Meeting 2008
The IRG meets on the Saturday of the annual CCME/AFMC meeting and has in previous years held a mixture of more or less formal meetings, demonstrations and focus groups. A key challenge for the IRG has been to firmly establish its working methods and base and to that end a formal business meeting was instigated at the 2008 meeting and will continue to be the first activity of the day.

The core business for 2008 was to establish robust terms of reference for the Group and to have them ratified by the AFMC. The key points of this were to:

- Change the name to Informatics Resource Group as ‘medical informatics’ refers to informatics used in medical practice (such as health records and coding) and not medical education.
- Establish the rules of engagement for the Group including membership, voting and governance
- Formalize the purpose of the IRG to be “to proactively advise the AFMC on matters of academic informatics, including information technology, e-learning, e-teaching, e-research and health informatics.”

The terms of reference were drawn up in the business meeting, adjusted and then ratified by the Group offline and finally ratified by the AFMC in October 2008. A copy has been appended as an annexe to this report.

The rest of the Saturday meeting was given over to an ‘unconference’ (for more on this format see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unconference) where topics and discussions of interest were drawn from the participants and impromptu sessions held around these topics. These topics included simulators, online social networking, service models, e-learning, electronic health and medical records, mobile data and tools, social accountability and interoperability, virtual patients, licensing and liability, sustainability, project planning, podcasting and at one point even a yoga session! This holistic informatics-oriented approach allowed a very heterogeneous group (educationalists, clinicians, technologists, librarians, administrators) to fluidly and quickly explore areas of common interest and options for collaboration, sharing and better understanding. Some typical end of session comments illustrate its success:

“I thought we were really behind everyone with our own unique problems - now I understand we’re all facing the same kinds of issues and we can help each other solve these common problems”

“I didn’t realize there was so much talent, so many good ideas, so much energy, and so much interest in collaboration and mutual support”
Participants’ reactions generally very favourable and the format will be repeated this year in Edmonton.

The IRG has one sub-group, the IT Group, chaired by Wes Robertson from Toronto that usually meets on the Sunday of CCME. Although topics were wide ranging the two main areas have been an ongoing benchmarking survey of Canadian schools as regards their IT facilities and resources and developing an exchange program to give IT professionals the opportunity to spend time in and thereby better understand the working IT environments of their peer institutions.

Finances

As a resource group the IRG receives $500 annually from AFMC, in-kind costs are met by the schools in terms of the time of their staff attending the annual meeting and any other ad hoc activities. These monies are spent meeting the additional costs of the CCME/AFMC meeting not met directly by AFMC such as network connections, data projectors and screens, power cables and catering. So far the funds have been effectively exhausted at each meeting. No additional financial support has been requested of the participants so far although options for this will be on the agenda for the 2009 meeting in the context of sustainable collaboration.

Initiatives

There are three current initiatives of the IRG:

1. Establishing a sound operational basis. Although there is a will to collaborate more on informatics issues between schools there are few practical opportunities to do so and few major problems that can only be addressed collaboratively. The Group is still exploring whether there can be active ongoing collaboration through the IRG and if so then in what way the Group should proceed. There is also a need to establish the practicalities of the relationship between the IRG and the rest of the AFMC (groups, committees and board), in particular how it can execute its support and consultancy mandate. Whilst there are technology-related issues brought to the AFMC there have as yet been no official consultancy activities involving the IRG.

2. Establish better mutual understanding and shared service and design models. The survey conducted by the IT subgroup has illustrated the significant variation in the form, resources and focus of technology services in the different schools. A broader benchmarking activity will extend and clarify the different ways in which schools organize and use technology services although it should be noted this is conducted as an exercise in better understanding the different contexts as well as technology-related services in Canada rather than seeking to rank or normalize what are essentially diverse approaches to technology use in medical education.

3. Improved liaison with other groups, in particular the AAMC Group on Information Resources (GIR). Meetings have been held between Morgan Passiment of the GIR and Rachel Ellaway regarding how the IRG and GIR can better work together. It is recognized that a) as members of the AAMC all 17 Canadian schools are also able to work as part of the GIR (and several are already active there) and b) the support and financial model for the AAMC GIR is quite different than for the IRG with much more resource available to and from the former. Passiment and Ellaway have been invited to attend each other’s meetings in Atlanta and Edmonton respectively this year.

Although not an initiative of the AFMC it is important to mention the Canadian Healthcare Education Commons - Collaboration pour l'éducation en santé au Canada (or just CHEC-CESC - an independent initiative of AFMC). CHEC-CESC has direct engagement with the IRG, not least because there are many parallels between the membership and remit and it originally emerged from the IRG and remains a key way for the IRG to support collaboration across the AFMC
schools. CHEC-CESC will be holding separate meetings and events during the Edmonton meeting. Further enquiries should be directed to Irving Gold at the AFMC.

Although there is now a membership model for the IRG the business meeting remains open to CCME attendees (although in a non-voting capacity) as does the unconference. Cross group liaison is encouraged and is already well underway with the libraries resource group.

IRG Chair: Dr Rachel Ellaway, March 2009
Annexe: IRG Terms of Reference

Name: Informatics Resource Group (IRG)

Mandate or Purpose: to proactively advise the AFMC on matters of academic informatics, including information technology, e-learning, e-teaching, e-research and health informatics.

Responsibilities

- Support and promote information and resource exchange in support of the informatics needs of the IRG’s members and attendees, and Canadian medical education as a whole.
- Lead directly, or through commissioned working groups take a lead, on academic informatics on matters of interest and importance to Canadian medical education.
- Act as the review body for informatics requests made to the AFMC and referred to the IRG to enable informed decision making by AFMC on issues that involve informatics.
- Establish links and connections with other groups nationally and internationally as appropriate in the pursuit of IRG mandate.

Membership

- Membership of IRG (for voting purposes) is based on two nominated IRG members per member institution of the AFMC.
- Attendance at meetings is open to non-voting participants from AFMC member of affiliated organizations.

Term of Membership

- Nominations of 2 members (typically one academic and one technical) for each institution are to be made by the Dean of each institution at the invite of the IRG Chair. Term of membership is 3 years.

Chair

- Chairs are recommended to the AFMC Board for appointment from within the group with a minimum of two-thirds support from voting members for a term of 3 years unless they relinquish the post within this time or they are removed by a two-thirds majority vote of the IRG or by the direction of the President of AFMC. Chairs may serve for more than one term if the IRG requests it and the individual is prepared to serve.
- Attendance at the IRG (non-voting) is open to all staff, faculty and students of member institutions of the AFMC and affiliate groups in attendance at the annual meeting and that a senior staff member of the AFMC will attend as liaison with AFMC.

Accountability/Reporting

- IRG will report annually to the Board at the Annual Meeting by written report with the option to respond to questions if called upon.
- The IRG report will be prepared in advance of the annual meeting, ratified at the IRG annual meeting and presented to the AFMC Board thereafter.
- Costs incurred by IRG will be met from the annual running budget provided by the AFMC for the IRG. Exceptional additional costs will be met from member funds by prior mutual agreement.

Meetings

- Face to face meetings at the annual Canadian Medical Education Conference.
- Additional special meetings will be convened at the agreement of 50% + 1 of voting member of the IRG.
- Quorum is based on the presence (physical or virtual) of at least one voting member from no less than two-thirds of the Canadian faculties at any given meeting.
- Voting is based on a 50%+1 majority of voting members present (physically or virtually) at any given meeting. Only business requiring explicit ratification or changes to policy or procedure requires a vote.
- Non-face-to-face IRG communications be via dedicated asynchronous AFMC communications channels.
- IRG can convene working groups to reflect the needs of its constituents with the guiding principle of having as few subgroups as possible to meet the needs of said constituency. These working groups or subgroups (standing or short life) of IRG report at least annually to the IRG, more often as required and directed.
- IRG and other AFMC groups and committees, such as the AFMC Committee on Libraries, will liaise at regular intervals, collaborating on projects where interests converge.
Staff Liaison: Irving Gold, Vice President, Government Relations and External Affairs