The introduction of the *Health Informatics Professional Core Competencies* in 2007 was a watershed for COACH. Prior to that, as an industry and as individuals we struggled to articulate, “What is health informatics?” and “What does a health informatics (HI) professional need to know and do?” Five years later, my grandmother, the guy next to me on the plane or the customs officer might still not understand what I do at first, but at least I now have a better way to explain it to them! Ours is a dynamic industry where knowledge is continuing to grow and evolve; as professionals we have increasingly important roles to play in enabling continuing improvements in healthcare delivery and we must indeed stay ahead of the curve.

This year a number of committed COACH volunteers undertook a major project to refresh the *Core Competencies*, containing the 46 knowledge areas, skills, attitudes and judgements which are the foundation for defining our profession and the central core to setting the direction for our Health Informatics Professionalism Program at COACH.

“Health Informatics (HI) is the intersection of clinical, IM/IT and management practices to achieve better health.” (COACH definition of health informatics)

**The 2012 Core Competencies Refresh Project**

The *Core Competencies* document was always intended to strike a balance between consistency and currency. Five years (i.e., 2012) from its original release was designated as the time for a major review. We determined that although the definition of HI and the overarching framework have not changed in the five years since the core competencies were first established, there have certainly been a number of advances in eHealth and the practice of HI and we should continue to anticipate new skills being required as we move forward.

With that in mind, we convened a group of experts who were intended to be as “representational” as possible of the field of HI (i.e., different practice settings, stage in career, geographic location, specialization, etc.). The process this expert group used to refresh the competencies for 2012 included:

- Brainstorming emerging trends in HI and in the healthcare system and workforce more broadly;
- “Rating” each of the existing competencies for relevance in 2012 (and for the next five years);
- Meeting at a one-day, in-person workshop to review the competencies and discuss the modifications and updates required;
- Reviewing the refreshed competencies over a series of teleconferences and by email (taking several iterations and discussions before the final document was prepared);
- Updating the introductory sections of the document and communications materials.

Finally, because the *Core Competencies* are so important to what we do as an association, they were formally endorsed by the COACH Board of Directors.

**What’s New with 3.0?**

The new edition of *Core Competencies* is an evolution, not a revolution. The original competencies were actually rather forward-thinking in areas such as patient safety, consumer health and more. For our profession to be prepared to enable continuing innovation, it is important that we are equipping ourselves with the skills for the future. Thinking ahead to the expectations for HI professionals in the coming years, the task force made several adjustments including:

- Increasing emphasis in the areas of patient safety, consumer health, architecture and integration, change management and quality improvement (either by adding competencies or wording within a competency);
- Streamlining content of some competencies so they are all at a similar level of detail and combining several competencies with overlapping content;
• Adjusting verbs of some competencies to address the level of knowledge/experience required.

The end result of all these changes is a slight increase in the number of competencies (from 46 to 50), but the overall structure and essence of the Core Competencies have not changed fundamentally.

Putting the Core Competencies to Work
In addition to the COACH resources produced, the HIP® Core Competencies have been very helpful to academic institutions. They have been used by several new HI/eHealth programs that have emerged since 2007 in developing their programs and in explaining to other faculty and leadership and to potential students what HI is all about.

The Core Competencies (in conjunction with the HIP® Role Profiles and other resources) have also been used by employers to help build job descriptions for emerging roles, think about organizational structure, round out job descriptions for existing roles and more.

Looking ahead, with innovations such as the career planning tool, we expect that Core Competencies 3.0 will be leveraged in new ways in helping us all prepare for the challenges and opportunities ahead, as well as enabling us to better profile HI in attracting new talent to our growing field of practice.

Key Concepts
Understanding the Core Competency Framework (Figure 1) (affectionately referred to as the “wheel” by many) is important to understanding the competencies themselves. The framework has not changed for 2012; if you are not as familiar with it, here are the important concepts explained.

• Competencies are the knowledge, skills, attitudes and judgments that a HI professional needs to perform safely and effectively in a broad range of environments and practice settings.
• Those who enter HI from another field will likely have competencies in one or more areas of the framework, but will need to round out their skills with knowledge/experience from the other areas before they are a HI professional.
• Those who graduate from HI programs will (usually) be familiar with the subject matter from the Core Competencies, but do not yet have the experience to perform each competency at the level to which they are articulated.
• For each role, individuals will have additional competencies. For example, a Standards Specialist will have much more depth in the standards (and other) competencies than is reflected in the Core Competencies. But regardless of their role in HI, the HI professional needs to have core knowledge about health information standards.
• It is important for all HI professionals to have these core competencies in order to function well as a team and leverage our respective talents!

What Else is New?
The Core Competencies drive many elements of COACH’s HIP® Program, and beyond.

HIP® Career Matrix and Role Profiles
As part of our Core Competencies refresh, we are also updating our HIP® Career Matrix and HIP® Role Profiles. Introduced in 2009, these documents were instrumental for the HI & HIM Human Resources Report which estimated the size of the Canadian HI and HIM workforces to be around 32,000 people. A separate HIP@work Task Force (TF) was convened to refresh these important resources. In order to ensure the jobs and associated role profiles are still relevant, over 500 HI jobs from across the country were analyzed, grouped and examined relative to the existing profiles. TF members also assessed each role profile for a “competency profile” – i.e., at what level would an individual in that particular role be expected to perform each individual competency. The TF also looked at emerging trends in HI and how these would impact roles. What new roles would be created? Would any existing roles no longer be relevant?

The refreshed Role Profiles document is scheduled to be available in late 2012. Watch for an announcement about the release of the updated Career Matrix.

CPHIMS-CA and Core Competencies
The CPHIMS-CA Exams are fully aligned to the Core Competencies, so the content outline (competencies tested) on the Canadian (CA) portion of the exams has been updated as well. The Exam Development Task Force and Exam Committee are working hard to develop new questions for the CA exam that relate to the new content outline, and an updated CA review guide to prepare candidates. The new exam will be introduced at e-Health 2013.
What’s Next?

Although there are a lot of projects related to HIP® planned for the next few years to expand the usage of the competencies, we anticipate that Core Competencies will next undergo a major refresh in 2017. Who knows, maybe by then we will have taken HI mainstream and the customs officer will immediately know and respect what I mean when I answer the question, “What is your profession?”

The new HIP® Core Competencies document is available on the COACH website:
www.coachorg.com

A Bit of History

The HIP® Core Competencies was the underpinning to COACH’s Health Informatics Professionalism Program. Prior to 2007, we conducted an extensive stakeholder consultation process. We determined that to begin to establish HI as a profession, an overarching definition was required, reinforced by a set of core competencies and strong conceptual framework to articulate what the field encompasses. Activities following this decision included:

- 2007: Developing the competencies followed a method proven for other professions. With the help of consultants, COACH researched other HI competencies, and held a facilitated workshop to further develop our competencies, first published as Version 1.0 in November 2007.
- 2008: COACH actively solicited feedback following the publication of Version 1.0. A workshop was held to review the results, and minor adjustments to the competencies were made. 2008 was also the year that COACH decided to create the Canadian supplement to the CPHIMS Exam and entered into a partnership with HIMSS.
- 2009: The competencies were further enhanced and validated. The main highlight with Version 2.0 was the addition of the HIP® Career Matrix, illustrating the breadth, depth and diversity of the HI field by categorizing and aligning typical HI jobs based on their commonalities, relative levels of mastery and areas of specialization. We (along with partners) also released the HI & HIM Human Resources Report, developed the HIP® Role Profiles, and conducted the first sitting of the CPHIMS-CA Exams!
- 2010: A CPHIMS-CA Canadian Review Guide was developed and more sittings of the CPHIMS-CA Exams were held.
- 2011: The Core Competencies went global as COACH collaborated with SBIS (the Brazilian Health Informatics Society), which adapted our competencies as the basis for their proTICS (professionalism) program. The groundwork for a new HIP® Career Tool was laid by developing and prioritizing requirements. Work on this continues; this online tool should be available in 2013.