

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Health Information Managers Respond to Auditor General's Report on eHealth Ontario

(London Ontario, October 7, 2009): The Canadian Health Information Management Association (CHIMA) welcomed the release of the Auditor General's Special Report and its recommendations.

CHIMA, the national professional association, represents more than 4,500 certified Health Information Management (HIM™) professionals from across Canada. HIM professionals are employed as records and information managers in hospitals; primary care; mental health; in the community and extended care sectors; agencies leading EHR initiatives in other jurisdictions; government; health and education institutions; the private sector including insurance and pharmaceutical companies; technology vendors; and consulting firms.

"CHIMA strongly supports the transition to electronic health records across Canada" said Gail Crook, CHIMA CEO and Registrar. "It has been frustrating to watch Ontario fall farther and farther behind the other provinces in their eHealth initiatives. We can only hope that the Auditor General's report spurs the Ontario government and the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to get back on track". The benefits of an EHR cannot be realized when jurisdictions are not keeping pace, and when fundamental components such as the Client Registry are not implemented fully. Client Registry initiatives across the country have had significant HIM involvement – from leading business teams to operationalizing Registries. Building the additional registries (Provider, Diabetes, etc) as outlined by eHealth requires the same skills and business expertise to realize their potential.

The Auditor General's report notes that while significant progress has been made in developing the eHealth infrastructure, little progress has been made with respect to content or in convincing healthcare practitioners to use the system. To date, CHIMA has not been consulted by eHealth Ontario or the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care on its eHealth initiatives. That too has been a source of frustration, because these deficiencies identified by the Auditor General were foreseen by CHIMA and are the areas in which CHIMA has expertise. We have the skills and knowledge to help with the Auditor's recommendations.

Carol Adam, CHIMA's Chair of the Board of Directors, who resides in Ontario, explained: "Our members are the content experts for health records; we have the experience and knowledge of the breadth of documentation from all health care professionals in a variety of health care sectors, and understand the nuances of information integrity, accuracy, validity and privacy. We are the interface between health care practitioners and the electronic health record. We are the people who make electronic records work. We could never understand why eHealth did not avail of our knowledge or ask for our participation."

A key element in the existing eHealth strategy is consent management. As described in the Auditor's report, the issues of consent management has plagued eHealth and this is one area in which CHIMA has a wealth of experience from which to draw. Technology is the enabler, but the logistics, the processes, and the safeguards that are essential are an area in which CHIMA members have vast experience. Years of working with paper records has given the HIM professional a unique perspective on the nuances of consents and operationalizing processes.

In early 2009, CHIMA although not invited to provide a response to the eHealth strategy, did submit a detailed response in support of the eHealth initiatives and outlined areas of CHIMA member expertise. On July 2, CHIMA requested and was granted a meeting with the Minister's office to offer support and assistance. On Monday, October 5th, CHIMA met with a senior executive of eHealth and made the same offer.

HIM professionals support care, patient safety, research, risk management, quality improvement, planning, funding and fiscal responsibility through the collection and analysis of health care data to produce quality information. Our Association hopes that as the eHealth agenda moves forward in Ontario that the HIM professionals are involved in these initiatives.

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