Biomedical and Health Informatics Series
Tuesday, January 30th, Room RR 134, 12:00-12:50

Bryant Thomas Karras, MD

Assistant Professor in the Department of Health Services in the University of Washington (UW) School of Public Health and Community Medicine, and Adjunct Assistant Professor, in the Division of Biomedical and Health Informatics

"Public Health Informatics Competencies - Defining the Specialty"

An important piece of developing a profession is defining the competencies—the skills and knowledge—an individual must have to be considered that type of professional. Defined competencies can be used to assess current skills, create career ladders, write job descriptions, evaluate job applicants, and develop training plans and academic curricula.

In 2005, recognizing that the emerging field of PHI has a deficit of individuals well-prepared to meet the needs of PHI practice and research, CDC's Office of Workforce and Career Development funded the University of Washington (UW), through a cooperative agreement with the Association of Schools of Public Health (ASPH), to develop a more detailed set of competencies to define the knowledge, skills, and abilities an individual must possess to be called a PH Informatician.   Although a few PHI academic programs and the CDC PHI Fellowship Program are beginning to fill the gap, PHI training needs to be more widespread and must be standardized to assure that a person with recognized programmatic training in PHI is competent in specific areas. A challenge to developing PHI training is the variety of topic areas covered in PHI projects and research, and the highly variable skills needed for different levels of informatics expertise.   This project considers the PH Informatician more expert in informatics than a highly functional public health professional who assists with informatics-related issues or supports personal productivity with information and information technology. They are experts in developing, applying, and testing the informatics best practices—the science of informatics—and might have the following job title: Chief Information Officer (CIO), Strategic Information Specialist, Standardized Vocabulary Specialist, Informatics Health Scientist, or Professor of Public Health Informatics. By developing such individuals, we can fill the many gaps that currently exist in public health agencies and academia.

The draft competencies have been released for public comment in October 2006 (www.cphi.washington.edu/competencies). We will discuss preliminary analysis of the consensus survey results.
Bryant T. Karras, MD, a Public Health Informatician, has a technical and problem-solving approach to public health informatics research with a background in Biomedical Engineering (UC San Diego), Internal Medicine (University of Wisconsin) and Medical Informatics (Yale). Dr. Karras teaches and mentors Masters and PhD students and has developed competencies, curricula and continuing education courses, both in the USA and internationally. He specializes in using informatics to improve public health via early detection, prevention, and health promotion. Previous research with funding from CDC and RWJF includes bioterrorism and epidemic detection using syndromic surveillance of clinical information systems, and using portable computers and the web for health survey data collection and guideline implementation. Dr. Karras is a founding faculty member of the CDC-funded UW Center for Public Health Informatics (cphi.washington.edu).

The Biomedical and Health Informatics lecture series covers current topics and developments in Biomedical and Health Informatics. Presenters include faculty, students, researchers and developers from the University of Washington, other academic institutions, government, and industry (locally and nationally). The intended audience is the broader University of Washington and Seattle area community with an interest in BHI as well as BHI faculty and students.

Series Website: http://courses.washington.edu/mebi590/