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The Gardener of Technology

A profile of Joanne Gard Marshall

CYNTHIA MARTIN

You can forgive Joanne Gard Marshall if she throws in a metaphor or two about health and technology growing like an English country garden.



Although the garden appears to be overgrown and wild, it's actually a complex and specially selected mix of thriving compatibles – much like the domain of health informatics.

“We bring people and information together with the help of technology,” she said, “but people will always come first in our field.”

As an avid gardener and Dean and Professor at the School of Information and Library Science at the prestigious University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Dr. Marshall well understands how to work with the university community to build an integrated school of information professions that includes librarians, archivists, records managers, and information systems professionals.

“Our graduates are finding employment in a wide range of information-intensive jobs,” said Dr. Marshall. With almost 30 years as a librarian and researcher, she knows first-hand the importance of the information-intensive environment and the need to translate information to other users. “Health sciences is my own domain interest and I worked for 16 years as a health sciences librarian before doing my PhD in community health and becoming a faculty member,” she added. As an Editorial Advisory Board member for *ElectronicHealthcare* she says, “I recognize the importance of the digital media as a tool for improving healthcare and I look forward to participating in the growth of the journal as a key source of information.”

Her main interests are in health information needs and services; evaluation of library and information services; information technology and the aging workforce; competencies of library and information professionals; and benchmarking. Appointed as Dean in 1999, she's been working at the number one ranked school of information

and library science (*U.S. News & World Report*), always in the burgeoning field of health informatics. Prior to becoming Dean, she was Professor, Faculty of Information Studies at the University of Toronto and held cross appointments in the Department of Health Administration, the Centre for Health Promotion, the School of Graduate Studies and the Institute for Human Development, Life-Course and Aging. She also taught a variety of continuing education courses, including Interpersonal Skills for Information Professionals and Consumer Health Information Services.

With a PhD from the University of Toronto (1987) with a dissertation entitled “The Adoption and Implementation of Online Information Technology by Health Professionals,” she learned early of the field's potential and benefits. She holds a Master of Health Science from McMaster University (1978), a Master of Library Science from

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McGill University (1968), and a BA from the University of Calgary (1966).

Dr. Marshall has received numerous professional and association awards; is a long-standing member and served on the boards of the Medical Library Association and the Canadian Health Libraries Association; has a number of publications that include numerous journal articles, and monographs and reports; and has given many presentations on education and health. Recent grant support includes being a co-investigator for *The Use of MEDLINE and Computer Conferencing by Dentists*; *Using the Internet to Enhance Access to Health Information Resources in Trinidad and Tobago*; and *Redefining the Role of the Hospital Library in the Changing Health Care Environment*.

Although she deals with data, information and technology, she never forgets the human aspect of her work and her role as a leader in the community. "I like to think that I am a good listener and that I try to take everyone's opinion into consideration," she said. "I also enjoy what I do tremendously and I let my enthusiasm show." Rounding out this very full life, she also teaches yoga in the employee health program at UNC and hopes to expand classes to older residents of the community.



VICTOR SIMON

When Victor Simon speaks of being a committed hockey dad, you can't really tell if he's speaking about his three active children or his teamwork skills at The Ottawa Hospital General Campus.

"Let's face it; there are plenty of opportunities for improvement in the healthcare sector and working with dedicated professionals who share the same drive to enhance service quality, research and education in health is very rewarding," he said. "I'm genuinely interested in improving patient care. Health is one of, if not the most important value in our society and it's a privilege for me to be part of this business."

Victor believes that strong leadership along

with the availability of accurate and timely data are imperatives for effective resource management and quality patient care, and he spends a great deal of his time trying to understand information needs of clinicians, hospital management, and staff. With colleagues on the senior management team, he establishes priorities and development plans for information systems investment.

"Since The Ottawa Hospital merger in 1998," he noted, "we've been able to successfully transition from disparate systems and infrastructure technologies in four different hospitals to today's integrated clinical and business solutions."

With one of the most important challenges being to deliver high quality services in a financially constrained environment, Victor's IT strategy focuses on technologies and systems that will allow them to streamline service delivery. He noted that, "We'll need to look at orders management and clinical documentation solutions, and more importantly, consider our role as a major provider of hospital services in Eastern Ontario."

For Victor, a dedicated team member, this means developing stronger partnerships and relationships with other service providers to offer patients integrated and seamless care throughout the region, and developing a unique patient identifier/master patient index. In addition, establishing a clinical data repository will enable clinicians to quickly access patient care information generated across all the hospitals in the region.

"A proposal to move in the direction of open systems and technologies has already been developed, and hospitals in our region have a good track record of moving forward on these types of initiatives," he said. "We now need a strategy to make it happen over the next few years and then turn our attention to bringing in family physicians, pharmacies, community labs, home care and other service providers."

One of the affiliated pursuits that cheers Victor is being involved with *ElectronicHealthcare*. "Leveraging information technologies to enhance resource management and service quality in healthcare today is


a must and learning about other success stories and initiatives across Canada will accelerate the adoption of these technologies and spread the benefits more quickly.”



However, living in Ottawa and with a MA in Public Administration from Carleton University (1985), it's no surprise that his peers note he tends to get very impatient when politics get in the way of optimal resource utilization and patient care. Victor admits that, “a little – or a lot more – patience in dealing with the political agenda is clearly indicated.”

Over the past 20 years, Victor has held leadership and management positions covering just about every facet of hospital management, in paediatric and adult academic health sciences centres. His current role as Operating Officer and Corporate Vice President of Surgery, Medicine, Laboratory Medicine and Information Systems, revolves around management of clinical services and information systems. Prior to 1998, he was the hospital's Vice President of Professional

Services and Information Systems. From 1989 to 1991, he was Assistant Executive Director, Montreal General Hospital, and prior to that Vice President of Hospital Services, Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, among other positions.

In February, Victor completed a 360-performance evaluation with an external consultant. His effective leadership, facilitation and communication skills were noted, as well as a strong understanding of healthcare management. And so, on those cold days hanging around hockey arenas, the happily married Victor just has to remember the consultant's comment that really warmed him up, “He has always put patient care first.” 

Mr. Victor Simon is now the Chief Operating Officer of the McGill University Health Centre in Montreal. The MUHC results from the merger of McGill University Faculty of Medicine, the Royal Victoria Hospital, the Montreal General Hospital, the Montreal Children's Hospital and the Montreal Neurological Hospital. Mr. Simon's challenge is to facilitate the transition from the current five-campus configuration to a new single site near the downtown area.

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