

PROFILES - PEOPLE IN OUR PROFESSION

MICHELLE BAMFORD, CCHRA(C)

President-Elect, HRABC

by Gary B Arnold, CCHRA(C)

When the original “Profiles” article was written in 1997, the purpose for creating the series was to serve as a vehicle to introduce association members to each other. In the ensuing years, this goal has been achieved, allowing individuals to share their backgrounds with others - so that all of us can better appreciate the depth of character and contribution that many members make.

By nature, some members have tended to find the limelight and be in positions that provide very public platforms - consequently, high visibility and renown by many. Yet, often the opposite is found - and some tend to quietly function, avoiding the fanfare and offer their professional service and contributions, unobtrusive and with competence.

As we come to the conclusion of another executive year, we prepare our annual “presidential” profile on our in-coming president - a member who is largely unknown by many outside of her home locale - yet she offers a unique dedication and insight which our association will come to appreciate during the term of her presidency. It is with this flavor that the *Printout* recognizes and welcomes the role that **Michelle Bamford** will play over the coming year.

Michelle was born in Leicester, England - moving to Edmonton, Alberta when she was two years old. It was here that she received her formal education - although she confesses that during this time, there were no events which she would term as “outstanding”. Upon graduation from high school, she entered the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT) - embarking on studies for her career choice of Court Reporting.

After a two month trial - Michelle discovered the evidence that she had made a wrong choice, and that she knew she could not follow this occupation for the rest of her working life. A visit to the NAIT career advisor led to her becoming aware of the Health Record Technology program. *“It looked interesting and obviously it was a better ‘fit’ as I have spent the last 18 years in the field.”*

Graduation in 1984 offered new opportunities - and Michelle grabbed at them. Following a six-month temporary coding assignment for the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, she accepted a position at St. Joseph’s General Hospital in Vegreville, Alberta as Director, Health Records. However *“...wasn’t keen on a small community... I went back to Edmonton every weekend, as soon as I got off work, and only returned to Vegreville early Monday morning (I was 19 years old at the time, and used to living in a reasonably large city)”*. So, as things always seem to work out, Michelle found an advertisement for a coding position at the Victoria General Hospital - in Victoria, BC. *“When the job in Victoria was advertised, I knew I liked coding and I had been to Victoria on a school band trip, so knew I would probably like living in Victoria. As it turns out, it was a good decision.”*

Arriving in 1985, and after gaining more experience as a coder, she was offered the position as Senior Analyst, which she worked at until two years ago, when she accepted her current responsibility as Regional Coordinator, Clinical Information Services. During her tenure in Victoria, Michelle has seen the amalgamation of the Victoria General and Royal Jubilee Hospitals into the Greater Victoria Hospital Society, which later expanded again - with regionalization - into the Capital Health Region. More recently, greater changes as the regions merged into the Vancouver Island Health Authority. She states that the greatest challenges she faces in her current position are the balancing of time/workload/expectations.

When asked to draw on her experience in the profession and as a supervisor, about her advice to current working professionals about how to look at continuing education, Michelle responded, *“decide what area of Health Information Management interests you - for example, classification expert, data mining/retrieval, data analysis, data display, financial management, performance improvement, utilization management, release of information/FOI, application support (computer techie person), educator (students/users of health information) management/leadership.”* She continued with further advice *“...local community colleges/universities have courses in software applications ...management/leadership and computer techie courses...as well as Distance Education from universities and reading professional journals.”*

As an education consultant for the Canadian Healthcare Association, Health Information Services Program, Michelle is also quick to recommend that *“HRTs try and take your second year via the Canadian Healthcare Association. It updates your skill set to the current entry level requirements and has the potential to open up additional opportunities that you may not have thought of before.”*

And, not being the kind of individual to merely offer advice, she will be applying for admission to the British Columbia Institute of Technology, Bachelor of Technology, Healthcare Subspecialty, undergraduate degree program.

As a relative new-comer to the Health Record Association of British Columbia (HRABC), she jumped into a leadership role by accepting the position of President-Elect for the 2002-2003 term of office - and will assume the HRABC Presidency at the annual General Meeting and Conference in Victoria, September 26-27, 2003. As well, Michelle has extended her participation further, by working as a member of the HRABC Data Quality committee.

Looking forward, she was questioned about the future of our profession - and if she could make one dramatic shift in direction, what would it be? She replied, *“Not sure how to answer this one, but here’s my best effort. Speaking from a Clinical Information perspective, as that is what I know best...I think we need to not be complacent with the world we work in today. More and more, the data that we collect is used for major decision making, not only by the government but by outside researchers, pharmacy companies and healthcare consultants. I think encouraging/supporting the existing workforce to take additional education, provide opportunities to use their new skills and pass on the on-the-job knowledge they have gained over the years. All of this is hard to do with the very real realities of workload, budget cuts and staffing cuts. It takes time and planning to do these things, but the rewards (for the staff and yourself) do outweigh the ‘costs’.”*

Michelle also feels that we have many great challenges facing us in the future. She listed as areas we need to be watching:

- New opportunities with the electronic health record, managing electronic information, security, the whole way we do business as we move from a mainly paper environment to a mainly electronic environment.
- Having enough skilled individuals to replace those of our profession who will choose retirement in the next few years.
- Healthcare moving from the hospital setting to a community setting, leading to the ability to work from home.
- Challenges of managing a virtual workforce.
- Promoting a higher profile/recognition for the specialized skill set that we have, outside the Health Record community.

All work and no play would certainly not describe Michelle adequately, as her well-rounded interests have shown. A seasoned traveler, she has been to Japan, Holland, Germany, Austria, United Kingdom and various places in the United States. However, when she spends her time in paradise (as Victoria is often described) she partakes in Volkssporting - which involves walking between thirty to forty kilometers per week. She will sometimes do longer walks of over fifty kilometers. Recently, she has started riding a bicycle again, after a hiatus of twenty-three years! And to show her level of fitness, Michelle recently took part in an event in St. Albert, AB where she completed an eleven kilometer walk, thirty-three kilometer bicycle ride and 300 meter swim - ALL IN ONE DAY!

In addition to caring for her Mum, Michelle also enjoys playing the clarinet, knitting and doing cross-stitching. Currently, her future travel goal is to visit Australia.

Active, Articulate, Able - are all terms to describe Michelle Bamford - a professional with an eye focused clearly on the future. As she assumes her new role as President, we need to offer her support as she works to help all of us make the transitions she envisions.