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EXPLOITING EXISTING DATA FOR HEALTH RESEARCH CONFERENCE REPORT

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Conference report

"Exploiting Existing Data for Health Research" was held at the University of St Andrews in Scotland from the 28th-30th August 2013. This was the fourth such conference organised under the auspices of SHIP (The ScottisH Informatics Programme) which is a collaboration between the Universities of Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow and St Andrews with the Information Services Division (ISD) of NHS Scotland. It serves to provide a research platform for the use of electronic health records.

A day of training workshops was held prior to the official opening of the conference. The governance workshop was well attended with interesting discussions around challenges to information governance.

The conference opened with a plenary address from Dr Chris Chute of the Mayo Clinic, who discussed Big Data and healthcare.

Both the significant increase in delegate numbers as compared to the previous conference, and the diverse range of countries represented at this year's conference are indicators of the growing recognition of data linkage for health research not only on a Scottish, but also at a UK and an International level.

The conference organisers offered a very compact programme of events centred around the key conference themes which included: the value of record linkage in health research; the use of routinely collected data in clinical trials; patients' Rights and the Public Interest: What does good governance look like? and the methodological challenges of record linkage. Each of the panel sessions included global perspectives of data linkage studies in practice and discussion of practical, methodological and governance issues around such research. The fact that many presenters and delegates were attending from outside the UK (with notable contingents from Canada and Australia – both well-known for their successes in this area) offered the opportunity to share experiences and to form global comparisons.

One plenary included discussion of where e-Health research is headed in the UK by Professor Ronan Lyons, Professor Iain Buchan, Professor Harry Hemingway, Professor Andrew Morris and Dr. Chris Dibben. The new e-Health infrastructure, a UK wide endeavour was discussed, with particular focus on the governance challenges that might arise out of such initiatives.

A particularly memorable keynote entitled "Reboot 2020" was offered by Sander Duivestein from the Institute for the Analysis of New Technology at Sogeti. The author of "Me the Media: The Rise of the Conversation Society", Sander offered a particularly thought-provoking presentation on just how technology-dependant our lives are, and shared with us his projections for the future.

Of course, remaining true to Scottish hospitality, an exciting social programme was also offered including a whisky tasting and a conference dinner with traditional ceilidh dancing at the famous Old Course Hotel.