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International Conference on Healthcare Information Technology Advancement

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(Theme of this year's conference is "Expediting Healthcare Reform through Service Innovation and Stakeholder Engagement.")

• Good morning, and welcome to Western Michigan University. This IT Forum has become a new but much-anticipated tradition in the IT community and also among our faculty and students. This is our second international forum on a topic that has become an area of a well-deserved and growing reputation for this University. I am pleased that it offers you an opportunity to visit our campus and spend a productive day talking with your colleagues from other organizations and hearing about some of the latest and best thinking on critical issues facing you in your professional lives.

• I'm even more pleased that the forum's focus on health informatics has put this University and this community of IT professionals at the cutting edge of one of the most critical issues of our time--health care reform. If there was anyone left who still needed convincing, the past two weeks should have finished the job of letting everyone know that good health care practices, delivery efficiencies and well-executed information technology strategies will determine the success or failure of our major national commitment to reform.

•Your co-chairs for today's event are Dr. Bernard Han, director of WMU's Center for Health Information Technology Advancement--CHITA--and professor of business information systems, and Dr. Sharie Falan, associate director of CHITA and assistant professor in the WMU Bronson School of Nursing. Their partnership in this effort is a perfect example of how the two professions can and must come together to find solutions to the inefficiencies, redundancies and waste that have plagued our nation's health care industry.
• Health care IT--Informatics, if you will--is at the core of how this country will reduce costs and become more efficient in meeting health care needs. I know a little about this because WMU is in the process of establishing a medical school and ensuring the school we establish is one that is focused on how medicine will be practiced in the future. Our first class of students will begin in fall 2014, and our commitment to them is that they will become part of a health care and higher education community that is focused on change and adapting to the medical landscape of the future.

• We know that IT is a tool medical students must use from their very first day in medical school. And we know that IT is the way medical data will be gathered, organized, stored and communicated between professionals.

• But it also can enhance communication between doctor and patient. And IT must play a role in educating a generation of students who are comfortable with and expect electronic tools to learn and explore the academic disciplines that are at the heart of medical education.

• For people in your profession who have taken the opportunity to enhance their health care knowledge and skills, the future is not just bright, it is dazzling. Five years ago, a survey published by the New England Journal of Medicine revealed that only 4 percent of the nation's physicians have a fully functional electronic records system. The paper trail of our nation's medical profession is notorious.

• That may have improved a bit. Maybe it's up to seven, eight or even 10 percent by now. But I suspect there is plenty of work still to do. Simply put, our ability to gather and organize information digitally far exceeds our ability to put it to daily use.
Think about the possibilities--that's what conferences like this should be all about. Think about those times in your own lives when medical care was delayed because your family doctor's IT system couldn't communicate with your cardiologist's system and neither system was compatible with your hospital's data system. Think about the times you hand carried a CD full of x-rays to be certain it was available to a doctor making critical decisions about your health or the health of your child.

We have the technology that could change all that. And we're on the brink of a future that will see that happen. You are an enormous part of that future. Thank you for being here and being a part of this important event. I hope you find your time here well spent, invigorating and even inspiring.

My wish for you is that today's discussions get your creative juices flowing and spark ideas that can be implemented. We're counting on you. And I hope we see you back on campus often in the future.

Thank you.