Zoom On: Taha Kass-Hout, FDA Chief Health Informatics Officer

Taha Kass-Hout
******@***fda.hhs.gov

Chief Health Informatics Officer -
US Food and Drug Administration
(FDA)
Founder - Humanitarian Tracker

Taha Kass-Hout has been a leader in the fields of health and informatics for nearly two decades. He is the first Chief Health Informatics Officer of the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA). He is also the founder of Humanitarian Tracker, which uses crowdsourcing to map the spread of disease and disasters such as the current crisis in Syria.

A believer in open government, Kass-Hout is an advocate for innovation and cross-border collaboration. In alignment with the White House Cloud Initiative, Kass-Hout launched the the first Department of Health and Human Services program to be completely hosted in the cloud. In 2012, he was co-chair of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) Biosurveillance sub-committee, charged with "detecting aberrations from the norm."

Through his leadership in information management, Kass-Hout has frequently been involved in the response to disease outbreaks. In 2003, with the outbreak of SARS, he helped to develop the eQuest data collection and analysis platform for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). In 2009-2010, he supported the CDC as it called for hospital emergency department monitoring in coordination with public health agencies.

Using Technology To Save Lives

Kass-Hout is an active participant in educational programs that aim to improve clinical quality and safety through the use of information technology. He is a subject matter expert on data and scientific computing systems, and an advocate for information technology in clinical settings. He also leads committees within the US and abroad which represent the needs of medical and clinical communities.

Kass-Hout is credited with a number of humanitarian innovations. In 2010, for example, the Thomson Reuters Foundation used the InSTEDD Riff open source social networking platform to communicate with survivors of the earthquake in Haiti. Free text messages sent to mobile phones allowed the people of Port Au Prince to receive the latest disaster-relief information.

Humanitarian Tracker

Kass-Hout founded Humanitarian Tracker, a non-political and non-religious crowdsourcing forum that offers tools for "citizen journalists" to tell their stories via text, photos and video submissions. Contributors have access to training tools and methodology for sharing eye-witness accounts of human rights violations, natural disasters, and the spread of disease. Current projects being tracked include ebola screening and polio vaccinations in war-torn Syria.

Humanitarian Tracker's data mining tools incorporate news from blogs, social media and official reports to form a live map of what is happening in the world. Accounts which are submitted by citizens are verified against other citizen reports and/or official sources in order to ensure accuracy. Accuracy, along with identity protection of anonymous citizen reporters, particularly in war zones, are of utmost importance to the organisation.

Kass-Hout earned a master of science degree from the Department of Biostatistics at the University of Texas School of Public Health. His MD degree is from the University of Texas Health Sciences Center in Houston, where he also completed some of his clinical training. Additional

training was accrued at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, which is affiliated with Harvard University.

References: FDA, Humanitarian Tracker
Image Credit: FDA

Published on : Tue, 20 Jan 2015