

# The Cloud 2015 Invited Speaker: Paul Higgins

**Paul Higgins will be joining us as an Invited Speaker at the 2015 NZIMRT-AIR Scientific Meeting. A Futurist with Emergent Futures, he is extremely well-suited to share his thoughts on our conference theme, ‘The Cloud: Shaping our Future’.**

Paul is a graduate of the Leadership Victoria Program and a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Company Directors. He is a guest lecturer at Victoria University on the disruptive effects of web technologies and a technology editor on Tumblr. Paul writes and presents regularly on future disruptions to business models, and consults to a range of organisations on how to think about the future.

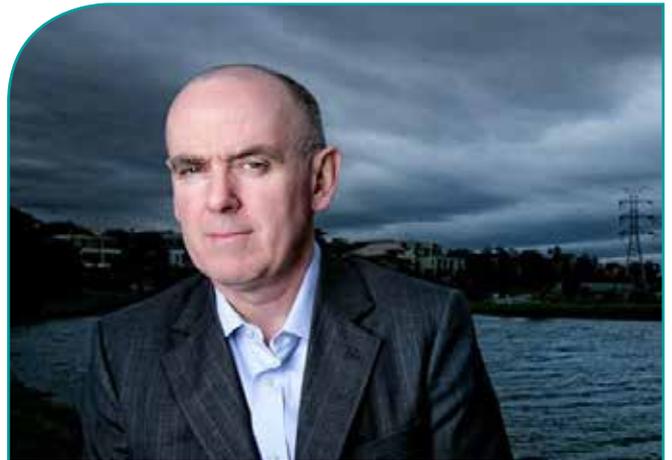
At the 2015 NZIMRT-AIR Scientific Meeting in Wellington, Paul will present on possible futures for medicine and the health system including new models incorporating robotics, artificial intelligence and cloud-based computing platforms.

## Can you please share with us a brief outline of your varied professional background?

My original qualifications were a veterinary degree and a research degree on diagnostic systems for mycoplasmas in chickens. I then went into large animal general veterinary practice and became interested in being more specialised as I realised that the best farmers were rapidly outpacing me because of my need to be across so many animal species.

Over time I moved more and more into the agribusiness strategy side of things. My family background had always been one of interest in ideas and debating those ideas so when an opportunity came up to do a Masters Degree in Strategic Foresight I jumped at it, making a profoundly non-rational decision in 3 seconds and then spending a month justifying it with rational analysis.

I think the matching of a scientific and rational background and training with a wider range of skills around politics, social issues, philosophy, behavioural economics etc allows me to vary approaches and have a wider appreciation of problems. Along the way I have been involved in various business, political and not-for-profit organisations because I have always believed in ‘doing’ as well as ‘thinking’. The combinations of all those things brings multiple levels of perspectives to bear when thinking about that the future looks like.



## We are delighted to have you as an Invited Speaker at The Cloud 2015 – what has motivated you to participate in this Meeting?

My partner owns medical practices in Australia and we have been having a vigorous debate on what the future of health looks like from all sorts of perspectives. So I am deeply interested in this area. In addition I am fascinated by the disruptive effects of technology on business models and approaches in lots of sectors. The chance to come and influence your conference attendees and to learn from them is very exciting.

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## Your presentation will consider the possible futures for medicine and the health system—please explain more for our readers.

The three key issues in my mind are:

1. Augmented health services using specific artificial intelligence systems. We are a long way from a general artificial intelligence but more and more evidence is emerging that specific systems augmenting human intelligence and other human skills will outpace both individual humans and individual artificial intelligences. Used in the right way computer systems can augment our skills and circumvent our cognitive biases. That is going to upset some of the current hierarchies because some people will be better at working in that environment than others.

2. Networks and connectivity. From the development of portable systems that can be run on smartphones, to the sharing of information via cloud-based systems, to the connections that allow increased levels of innovation, we are moving into a world where collaboration and networks will be far more important than today.

3. 'People first' has to be the driving central imperative. It is really easy to get caught up in the 'machines that go ping', and our machines and intelligence systems are going to get better and better. However, if we lead our strategies and approaches by technological capacity, we will fail. If I had cancer I would rather be diagnosed by a machine, but I would not want to be treated by a machine. As our technological capability grows, our human capacity for understanding people becomes a more critical skill.

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## How important is 'foresight' in keeping up with fast-paced technological developments?

As a futurist I am always going to say “very important” but I think that it is getting more and more critical. We live in world that is moving faster and faster. Global connections are meaning that innovation and change can come from anywhere. However, this creates a paradox, because as the world moves faster and faster we also need to work harder and harder just to keep afloat - therefore we have less time to think about what the future might hold and why it might affect us. So just at the time when foresight is becoming more important, we have less time to devote to it. I think that this creates a huge level of risk in organisations that we need to address.

## On an individual level, do you have any advice for health practitioners who wish to keep their skill set up to date in order to keep up with changing systems?

William Gibson, the science fiction writer is famous for saying “the future is already here, it is just unevenly distributed”. So my advice would be to scan wide and deep. The wide part is about looking at other industries, countries and cultures other than your own in order to provide a wider range of perspectives into your thinking. The deep part is about getting below the surface to really understand what is driving change, rather than just the surface trends or fads.

From a practical point of view one method I use is to follow a selected group of people from twitter. That group comes from different countries and different technical backgrounds and some are deliberately on the list because they generally disagree with how I think. I religiously follow them on a daily basis by using a specific column on Tweetdeck and get to see what they are seeing and how they are thinking. That is a capacity that we did not have even a decade ago. If readers go to my twitter page at @futuristpaul they can see the list which is called “my perspective list”.

## Are there any issues relating to The Cloud and technological advances that you think are of particular concern?

I think that the two biggest issues are privacy and the slow moving pace of the health system in general and these issues are intertwined. We need to respect the privacy of individuals while trying to accelerate the change that is happening in the health system because there are huge benefits to be gained in people's lives if we can free up levels of innovation and change.

Paul Higgins is a Futurist with Emergent Futures

*Paul has been sponsored by Conference Partner Varian to present at The Cloud 2015.*

