

1928-1998: a World of Change

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It's quite a different world today than it was in 1928 when our Association was founded. Back then, the news item of the day was Amelia Earhart's landmark flight across the Atlantic. A year later, the country was immersed in the Great Depression, an era precipitated by the stock market crash of 1929. AHIMA, then named the Association of Record Librarians of North America, held its first annual meeting that year.

The 1930s brought about new standards—in the national government and in the Association. In 1934, curriculum and standards were established for medical record librarian schools. On the national front, President Roosevelt signed the Social Security Act into existence in 1935. A few years later, the Association created credentials for program registration of nine schools. And, by the end of the decade, World War II loomed with the German invasion of Poland.

The following decade was fraught with the aftermath of World War II and breakthrough change for AHIMA. The mid-1940s witnessed the end of the war and the beginning of a new era for the Association. The renamed American Association of Medical Record Librarians established a central office. At the same time, the Canadian branch of medical record librarians formed its own Association. In 1946, a House of Delegates was named to govern the membership. Internationally, tensions escalated between the US and the Soviet Union, developing into a Cold War in 1947.

Progress advanced our world and our membership in the 1950s. The first International Congress of Medical Record Keepers was launched in 1952. In 1958, the US sent its first satellite into orbit. And Association membership reached nearly 4500 by 1960.

In 1962, AHIMA produced correspondence courses for medical record staff. Significant healthcare changes were taking place nationally as well. By the mid-1960s, Medicare began to pay the healthcare expenses of US citizens age 65 and older. Elsewhere in the US, the end of the 1960s saw the assassination of two key leaders: Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert F. Kennedy. The Association experienced a second name change in 1970. Now known as the American Medical Record Association, the organization hailed the addition of the first Accredited Record Technician (ART) certified professionals in 1972. Other credential titles also changed to include the Registered Record Administrator (RRA) and the Medical Record Practitioner (MRP). While our industry continued to develop, a tumultuous atmosphere prevailed in the US, with dissension over the Vietnam War and the Watergate break-in.

By 1975 the Association established continuing education requirements for ARTs and RRAs. Our country celebrated its bicentennial in 1976. In a similar vein, members recognized the Association's 50th anniversary in 1978. The 1980s brought about the formation of several special interest groups within our ranks and the creation of the Councils on Education, Accreditation, and Certification. The Behavioral Health Section, our first specialty group, organized in 1982, followed by the Quality Management Section in 1983. In international news, Iran released 52 American hostages in 1981, ending their 444 days of captivity. Five years later, footage of the space shuttle Challenger dominated broadcast reports as it exploded seconds after takeoff. In 1987, the Association's third specialty group—the Long Term Care Section—was organized. Subsequently, the Assembly on Education was created in 1988.

The 1990s ensued with growth in special interest groups, depth in the volume of credentials offered, and a burgeoning membership. To better represent members' professional responsibilities, the Association was renamed the American Health Information Management Association. To guide members, AHIMA leaders forecast a vision of future roles emerging within the industry, entitled Vision 2000. The Ambulatory Care Section and the Society for Clinical Coding were both inaugurated in the early 1990s.

Internationally, a worldwide recession took hold in 1990 and the country geared up for the Persian Gulf War in 1991. AHIMA created the Team Talks format, formerly known as Focus Groups, to garner regional participation in Association developments. The first Certified Coding Specialist (CCS) credentials were also awarded.

As technological innovations and evolving organizational structures redefined professional positions across the globe, Association leaders contemplated the effects on members' roles in healthcare. Specifically, AHIMA's executive team and Board of Directors forecast emerging roles for health information management, formulating Vision 2006. By adapting Vision 2000 and projecting it into the next decade, these leaders articulated the career responsibilities that will be critical for effective and secure use of health information in the next century. Vision 2006 was presented to state leaders and the entire membership as a strategic action plan for health information professionals.

Also in 1996, the Joint Committee on Education was organized to advance health information program curriculum and requirements. AHIMA granted the first Certified Coding Specialist—Physician-based (CCS-P) credentials in 1997, complementing the hospital-based CCS certification.

In 1998, the membership population numbers more than 38,000, with potential for a continuing rise in the coming years. At this time, members represent a diversity of workplace settings, functions, and responsibilities. AHIMA now encompasses a network of component state associations, specialty groups and sections, and numerous professional alliances. It all began with 58 charter members 70 years ago—and continues to thrive with increasing purpose and vitality.

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