

AHIMA Convention Highlights Groundbreaking Standards Work

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By Anna Orlova, PhD

The AHIMA Standards Task Force is a collaborative of over 60 health information management (HIM) professional subject matter experts (SMEs)—all working together to lead national and global standards development for HIM. This groundbreaking work was on full display during last month's 89th Annual AHIMA Convention and Exhibit, which took place October 7 to October 11 in Los Angeles, CA.

The AHIMA Standards Task Force produced a variety of sessions and events at this year's convention, which ranged from highly technical to those that introduced the topic to individuals unfamiliar with AHIMA's work—and the role standards play in ensuring quality health information and quality care. The standards-relevant presentations at convention included:

- Workshop 1: AHIMA Action in Standards
- Workshop 2: Health IT Standards and Systems Interoperability 101: Setting the Stage for Success
- Workshop 3: Standards 201: Case Studies – Use of Standards in Healthcare Organizations
- Semantic Interoperability for Safety and Quality of Patient Care
- International Session: Leading the Way: AHIMA and National and Global Standardization
- Advancing the Road for Interoperability through Standards for HIM Practices
- AHIMA Standards in Healthcare Organizations
- Best Practices in Managing Patient Registries: At the Forefront of Health Information Management and Evidence-Based Medicine
- Moving from Legacy Classification Systems to SNOMED CT and CPT Based Clinical Content
- 62 Common Medical Records Mistakes
- Claims Attachments Go Electronic: A National Strategy

The standards events in Los Angeles included three pre-conference workshops, three educational sessions/panels, and presentations in the Exhibit Hall Innovative Classroom. "Standards are needed in healthcare to ensure that data capture and exchange of health information is accurate, complete, and available when needed to provide excellent care for patients," says Diana Warner, MS, RHIA, CHPS, FAHIMA, director, standards at AHIMA and a presenter of several standards-focused convention sessions.

For AHIMA Standards Task Force members, participation in the sessions on standards was an important step in communicating the impact of standards and AHIMA's efforts. "For me, it is important to participate in the sessions to not only explain the 'how' and 'why' of standards, but also to recruit new members to join in our efforts. You never know who the next brilliant idea will come from," says Lee Wise, MS, RHIA, CHCO, health information director/privacy officer at Andalusia Health and a presenter during the "AHIMA Action in Standards" convention session.

Donna Young, RHIA, CDIP, CCS, manager of health information at Memorial Hospital of Carbondale and St. Joseph Memorial Hospital, and a co-presenter of a health IT (HIT) standards-focused presentation at this year's convention, says she participated in the AHIMA convention in order to improve the transparency of patients' medical records documentation generated by electronic health records systems. "I believe having standards to govern the information in these medical records entries lends to consistency and quality patient care," Young says. "Without AHIMA's guidance as a proponent to information governance, we might miss the mark on the quality and integrity of our patient records."

AHIMA's focus on standards education is also important because revenue cycle codes are not sufficient to capture the complex clinical information that is found in laboratory and pharmaceutical information, according to Cheryl Mason, MSHI, director, client services at Wolters Kluwer, and co-presenter in a convention session on standards in healthcare organizations.

“Nor are they adequate to capture critical clinical observations and past medical history,” Mason says. “For this you need terminology standards like LOINC, RxNorm, and SNOMED. As stewards of the medical record, it is imperative that HIM professionals have a working knowledge of these standards and can apply them in their daily work.”

AHIMA and its members are leading the development of national and international standards for HIM practices for coding and terminology services, information governance, clinical documentation improvement, operational informatics, data analytics, and interoperability. AHIMA is also leading the adoption of standards-based HIM practices in healthcare organizations on a national and international level, as well as the development of a HIT, HIM, and informatics workforce capable of operating in a new interoperable standards-based healthcare environment. Standards such as those AHIMA’s task force is currently working on “provide those in the healthcare industry with guidelines we can all use to work as a team and provide the best quality care for the patients,” says Nicole Miller, MS, RHIA, of Miller and Miller Associates, and a presenter in several of the standards track sessions at convention this year. And, after all, as Miller noted, who better to develop standards than HIM professionals and experts?

The need for standards in healthcare has never been greater. That said, the importance of setting a standard for the profession isn’t new to AHIMA members familiar with such standards as the Standards for Ethical Coding, which Gloryanne Bryant, RHIA, CDIP, CCS, CCDS, national director, coding quality, education, systems and support at Kaiser Permanente, notes is the “gold standard for the healthcare industry and the HIM Coding Profession.” Bryant was a co-presenter in a convention session discussing how standards are commonly used in healthcare organizations.

“These standards are the guiding principles for integrity and compliance and provide the format and foundation for the expectations of professional conduct for coding professionals involved in diagnostic and/or procedural coding, data abstraction, and related coding and/or data activities,” Bryant says. In addition to the importance of having a standard for promoting awareness and compliance with ethical behavior, Bryant notes the importance of standards in other areas that pertain to HIM, such as continuing to “strive for and achieve a balance in functionality and features to ensure they adhere to official coding guidelines and requirements” as technology continues to advance.

“HIM professionals have a long history of advocacy for the medical record. As healthcare evolves, the medical record is changing to meet market needs,” says Katherine Lusk, MHSM, RHIA, FAHIMA, chief HIM and exchange officer, HIM/IT, at Children’s Health System of Dallas, and presenter in several sessions at convention. “Standards ensure clinical information can be communicated consistently and accurately for the many uses of the record spanning quality, financial, legal, research, and continuum of care. As the advocate for the record, AHIMA members should lead standards development.”

“The solo and small practice physicians who constitute the front line of healthcare in America want to deliver care that is integrated, accountable, collaborative, and coordinated,” says John Odden, co-founder and director, Collaborative for Universal Health, and a co-presenter in a convention session discussing how standards are commonly used in healthcare organizations. “AHIMA standards are the best visible pathway to lift the industry from ‘stove-piped digital patient charts’ to a more efficient and respectful community of providers who are accountable by choice.”

The AHIMA Standards staff would like to thank AHIMA members and friends for their participation in the convention standards-focused events and AHIMA Standards Task Force activities, leading national and global HIM standardization. To join the AHIMA Standards Task Force, please contact Diana Warner at diana.warner@ahima.org.

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