

# AHIMA Supports Patient Friendly Billing Project

Save to myBoK

*by Jessica Squazzo*

Joining the American Hospital Association, the Medical Group Management Association, and others, AHIMA announced its endorsement of the Patient Friendly Billing Project. Led by the Healthcare Financial Management Association (HFMA), the project was established in 2000 to help create a more patient-focused healthcare billing and collection process.

“We are very pleased with the support of AHIMA for this national project to make patient communication clear, correct, and concise,” says Richard L. Clarke, FHFMA, president and CEO of HFMA. “We recognize the important role AHIMA plays in the health information management arena.”

## Recommendations Guide Healthcare Industry

As a result of consumer research completed in the first two years of the project, HFMA developed recommendations for the healthcare industry:

- Follow the communication flow process desired by patients
- Use terminology readily understood by consumers
- Coordinate information-gathering processes to reduce redundancy
- Have internal processes designed to easily and promptly respond to patient requests for information and to resolve patient problems
- Design internal processes to improve data quality so that claims are less likely to be rejected or not match insurer records
- Include the right amount and type of information in financial communications
- Use formats that are easily understood and point readers to the action they need to take

In 2001, HFMA issued a report to hospitals and health systems introducing the project and providing general guidance for hospitals on how to respond to patient concerns regarding the billing process. In 2002, a similar report was issued to physician offices.

## Task Forces Take Off

The project’s focus has also expanded to technology vendors. In August 2002, the project’s technology task force began to develop guidelines and recommendations to improve the ability of technology to support patient friendly billing. The project receives support from leading professional service and technology firms such as Siemens Health Services and the information solutions division of McKesson.

Rose T. Dunn, RHIA, CPA, represented AHIMA on the Patient Friendly Billing Project and served on the terminology task force. The task force was charged with creating patient-understandable definitions for more than 200 terms used on claims, explanations of benefits, and other communications received by patients.

“As HIM professionals, we see patient confusion with the healthcare system—the complexities of healthcare, unfamiliar terminology, and a plethora of data that confuses the best of us,” says Dunn. “Helping the patient, even ever so slightly, with understanding their bill was most worthwhile,” she adds. “Ours and the other task forces’ efforts are now coming to fruition.”

## Good Billing Goes a Long Way

“Each of us can attest to the importance of this project,” says Linda Kloss, RHIA, CAE, executive vice president/CEO of AHIMA. “We have all tried to match the content of a bill or explanation of benefits letter to the services provided to us or a

member of our family. It's tough, even for those of us who know the lingo," she adds. "Presenting patients with understandable and accurate bills will go a long way to improving their overall trust in healthcare."

For more information about the Patient Friendly Billing Project, including the project's latest recommendations issued in its summer 2003 report, go to [www.patientfriendlybilling.org](http://www.patientfriendlybilling.org).

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