

AHIMA's Code of Ethics: Amid Change, Values and Obligations Are a Constant

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The practice of health information is changing dramatically, but the profession's ethical obligations are a constant. HIM professionals should recall these tenets and demonstrate them daily.

A Code of Ethics Refresher

The AHIMA Code of Ethics serves multiple purposes. As it states, it:

- Identifies core values on which the HIM mission is based
- Summarizes broad ethical principles that reflect the profession's core values and establishes a set of ethical principles to be used to guide decision-making and actions
- Helps HIM professionals identify relevant considerations when professional obligations conflict or ethical uncertainties arise
- Provides ethical principles by which the general public can hold the HIM professional accountable
- Socializes practitioners new to the field to HIM's mission, values, and ethical principles
- Articulates a set of guidelines that the HIM professional can use to assess whether they have engaged in unethical conduct

The code notes that HIM professionals are responsible for a number of ethical obligations, including the "protection of patient privacy and confidential information; disclosure of information; development, use, and maintenance of health information systems and health records; and the quality of information."

These obligations are essential to the HIM professional's responsibilities. Our united dedication and belief system make the HIM profession uniquely qualified to champion privacy and security.

Core health information issues include what information should be collected, how the information should be handled, who should have access to the information, and under what conditions the information should be disclosed.

Core HIM Values

"The mission of the HIM profession is based on core professional values developed since the inception of the Association in 1928," the code states. The HIM profession is known for these values and their inherent ethical responsibilities.

HIM professionals must maintain these values during their daily interactions. "The HIM professional values require a complex process of balancing the many conflicts that can result from competing interests and obligations of those who seek access to health information and require an understanding of ethical decision-making," according to the code.

Our actions must demonstrate these values and principles. We must:

- Advocate, uphold, and defend the individual's right to privacy and the doctrine of confidentiality in the use and disclosure of information
- Put service and the health and welfare of persons before self-interest and conduct ourselves in the practice of the profession so as to bring honor to ourselves, our peers, and the HIM profession
- Preserve, protect, and secure personal health information in any form or medium and hold in the highest regard the contents of the records and other information of a confidential nature, taking into account the applicable statutes and regulations

The code is available at <http://www.ahima.org/about/ethicscode.aspx>.

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