Advancing HIIM Professionals in Informatics and Data Analytics

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Health informatics and information management (HIIM) is a rapidly changing profession. Core competencies of fundamental AHIMA certifications, such as the RHIA or RHIT, create a strong foundation for pursuing employment in a variety of high-demand positions. Today's fast-paced technology landscape is driving new strategies for implementation, informatics, and analytics. This environment increases the demand for qualified health informatics professionals competent in system support and subsequent organizational support.

This Practice Brief provides background on the different roles for HIIM professionals related to healthcare data and informatics. The article also reviews the factors that can assist professionals in determining a career path in the fields of informatics or data analytics and meet the growing need for these skill sets in healthcare.

Considering the CHDA vs. CPHI

AHIMA offers two specialty certifications that align with informatics and data analytics expertise.[1] The Certified Health Data Analyst (CHDA) is a certification that demonstrates an individual can acquire, manage, analyze, interpret, and transform data into accurate, consistent, and timely information. The Certified Professional in Health Informatics (CPHI) is a certification demonstrating an individual has knowledge in data analysis, data reporting, data management, privacy and security, management of health information systems and processes, database management, and project management. Figure 1 below depicts the knowledge domains in each certification, as well as which domains overlap with other certifications.

Informatics and data analytics certifications can help HIIM professionals distinguish themselves in the job market. Qualifications, eligibility, and content information for all of AHIMA's credentials and certifications are available on the AHIMA certification page.

Figure 2 below depicts the broader field of informatics versus the more focused field of analytics. It also highlights many of the skills HIIM professionals have acquired in formal education and day-to-day practice.

Table 1. Comparison of CHDA and CPHI

	CHDA	CPHI
Eligibility	- Hold a healthcare information management credential (RHIT) and a minimum of three years of healthcare data experience, or - A baccalaureate degree and a minimum of three years of healthcare data experience, or - A healthcare information management credential (RHIA), or - A master's in heath information management or health informatics from an accredited school, or - A master's or higher degree in any discipline and one year of healthcare data experience	- Hold a baccalaureate degree and have two years of health informatics experience, or - A master's degree or higher and one year of health informatics experience

Why Obtain the Credential?	• You currently work as a healthcare data analyst, or • You have plans to work in a healthcare data role or in data or business operations in a healthcare organization, or • To provide future employers with documentation that you have demonstrated your expertise in health data analysis through a combination of education, experience, and formal certification	• You currently work in a role that requires an understanding of informatics tools or healthcare technology capabilities, or • You are using informatics tools to create performance metrics, or • You are hoping to obtain a role in an informatics field in the future
Potential Careers	• Data analyst • SQL reporting analyst • Data integration specialist • Revenue and reimbursement analyst • Healthcare analytics advisor • Business intelligence analyst • Quality data analyst	• Clinical informatics analyst • Clinical informatics specialist • Health informatics specialist • Informatics education specialist • Application analyst • Systems analyst

In a recent evaluation of current healthcare analytics and informatics roles, the authors of this Practice Brief found trends in the relevant position descriptions. The most frequent descriptors for informatics roles were "clinical," "analysis," and "quality." As a RHIA, RHIT, CCA, CCS, or CCS-P credential holder working directly or indirectly with coding, many HIIM professionals possess the foundation of clinical knowledge being sought in these positions. An understanding of diseases and the information necessary to map the disease to a diagnosis or procedure code allows an individual with this knowledge the capability to hold a position where clinical information needs to be tracked, stored, and managed. This knowledge also gives individuals the advantage of knowing what to look for when analyzing data, implementing new systems, or understanding what regulatory considerations are necessary. Those individuals looking to pursue a career in informatics may want to earn a master's degree in health informatics, and then sit for the exam to earn the CPHI credential.[2]

The top descriptors for analytics roles included "analysis" and "reporting." Exposure to vast amounts of clinical information as a RHIA, RHIT, CCA, CCS, or CCS-P credential holder would well prepare an individual for a role in analytics. Core competencies such as data quality, data accuracy, and the knowledge of how information flows throughout an organization—combined with the CHDA certification—give an HIIM professional an advantage in this type of analytics role. Those interested in pursuing a career in health data analysis should consider obtaining the Certified Health Data Analyst (CHDA) credential.

Figure 1: AHIMA Certification Knowledge/Domains[3]

AHIMA Certification Knowledge/Domains

DOMAINS	HEALTH INFORMATION MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS		CODING PROGRAMS			SPECIALTY PROGRAMS				
	Registered Health Information Administrator (RHIA®)	Registered Health Information Technician (RHIT®)	Certified Coding Associate (CCA®)	Certified Coding Specialist (CCS®)	Certified Coding Specialist—Physician-Based (CCS-P®)	Certified Health Data Analyst (CHDA®)	Certified in Healthcare Privacy and Security (CHPS®)	Clinical Documentation Improvement Practitioner (CDIP®)	Certified Healthcare Technology Specialist (CHTS™) Six Specialties	Certified Professional in Health Informatics (CPHI™)
Clinical Classification Systems and Coding	X	X	X	X	X			X		
Compliance	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		
Data Analytics	X	X				X		X		X
Data Content, Structure, and Standards	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
Informatics	X	X								X
Information Governance (Data Content, Structure, and Standards)	X	X								
Information Protection	X	X	X	X	X		X			
Information Technology	X	X	X	X	X		X		X	X
Leadership	X						X	X		
Privacy and Security	X	X	X	X	X		X			
Project Management										X
Research and Education								X		
Revenue Management	X	X	X	X	X					

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HIIM Skills Transfer to Informatics, Analytics Roles

HIIM professionals working in informatics roles bring specialized knowledge of documentation requirements essential to the successful development and implementation of electronic health record systems. Additionally, HIIM professionals are comfortable in roles that cross healthcare silos as they are accustomed to working with members of clinical departments, information technology services, patient accounting staff members, and more. With this cross-departmental expertise, the HIIM professional brings an understanding of systems and processes aiding workflow design projects.

In the analytical realm, the HIIM professionals' understanding of the methods and sources of data collection throughout the healthcare system, knowledge of the nomenclatures and classification systems used in healthcare, and experience in evaluating the quality and integrity of clinical data provide a distinct advantage for the role of data analyst. These attributes contribute to the analyst's understanding and ability to evaluate the quality and integrity of data. The analyst will use this knowledge to develop decision support tools for the organization.
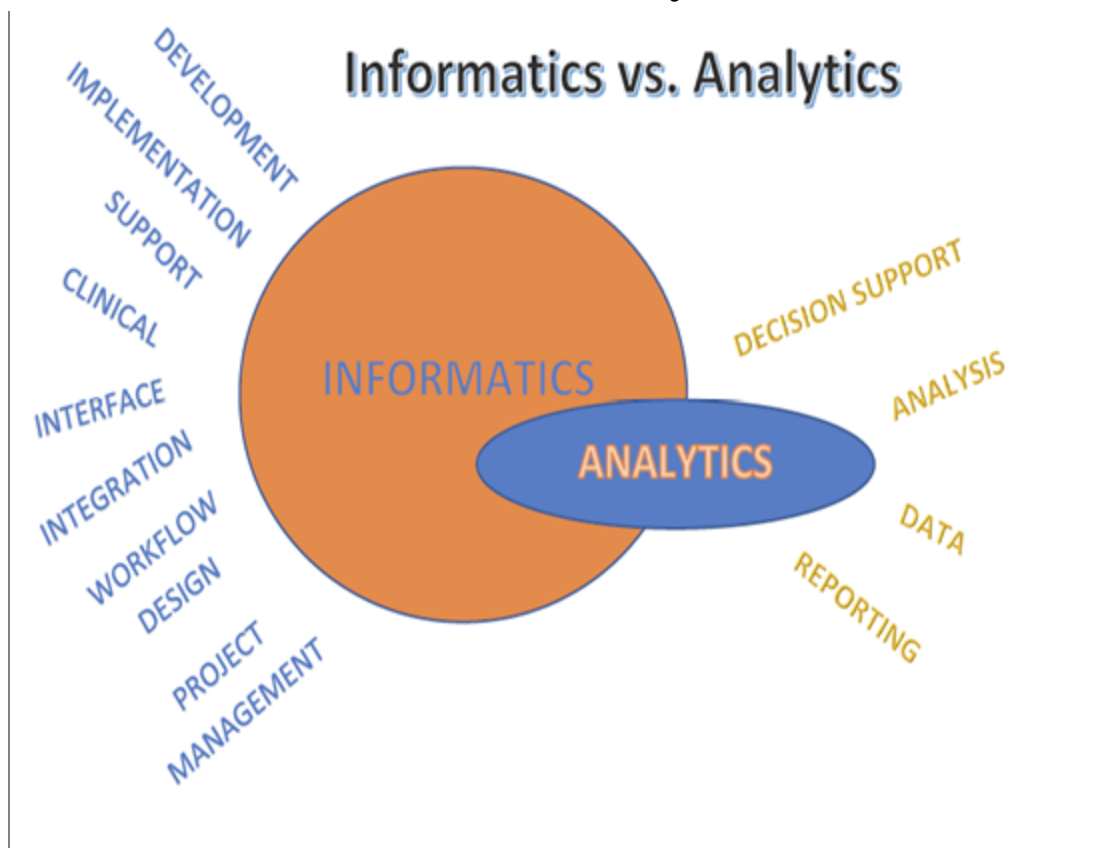
The HIIM professional who chooses to follow the informatics path will be well positioned to apply their skills throughout the system life cycle by playing an important role in system development, implementation, and support. The HIIM professional who chooses to follow the analytical path will have a focused role requiring depth of understanding of the data and skill with analytical tools. HIIM professionals can be confident that their education and training provides an excellent fit for informatics or analytics.

In pursuing a career in informatics or analytics, some of the additional skills HIIM professionals want to acquire are with reporting tools such as SAS, SQL, or ETL. Most reporting tools do not require an individual to know how to write SQL, but understanding how databases work and understanding the best way to extract information to build a report would be beneficial. A description of some common reporting business intelligence or visualization tools can be found in the following links: SAS; SQL; ETL; Tableau; Qlik.

Additional skills required for a career in health informatics may include project management and health IT expertise.

Figure 2: Informatics vs. Analytics

This graphic depicts the broader field of informatics versus the more focused field of analytics.

The Value Proposition for CHDA and CHPI

According to AHIMA's certification webpage, individuals who earn the CHDA designation will achieve recognition of their expertise in health data analysis and validation of their mastery of this domain. This prestigious certification provides practitioners with the knowledge to "acquire, manage, analyze, interpret, and transform data into accurate, consistent, timely, and actionable information, while balancing the 'big picture' strategic vision with day-to-day operations." CHDA-credentialed professionals "exhibit broad organizational knowledge and the ability to communicate with individuals and groups at multiple levels, both internal and external," AHIMA's website states.

A career website keyword search for "CHDA" revealed a variety of job titles, including data analyst, SQL reporting analyst, data integration specialist, revenue and reimbursement analyst, healthcare analytics advisor, business intelligence analyst, and quality data analyst—among others.

The CPHI credential page on the AHIMA website states: "With the continuing advancements in technology and the increasing demand for qualified health informatics professionals, the new informatics credential will provide credibility and recognition to individuals who possess the required knowledge and expertise of health informatics... It also demonstrates a competent workforce and professional group for system support, subsequent organizational support, prestige, and the opportunity to belong to a premier professional association."

A career website keyword search for "health informatics" revealed a number of job titles including clinical informatics analyst, clinical informatics specialist, health informatics specialist, informatics education specialist, application analyst, and systems analyst.

Table 1 summarizes the eligibility requirements, reasons to consider, and potential career opportunities when obtaining either the CHDA or CPHI credential.

The roles in health informatics and data analytics are continually expanding throughout the healthcare industry and producing greater demands for employment in all levels of HIIM practice. No matter which areas are explored or selected, HIIM professionals are in demand in informatics and analytics.

In the absence of qualified HIIM professionals, others with technical preparation—but often no awareness of healthcare—are being employed to fill the gaps. By growing with the profession as detailed in this Practice Brief, a HIIM professional can enrich their skills and competencies and increase the potential for career advancement in this interesting and exciting informatics era.

Notes

[1] AHIMA. "Why Get Certified."

[2] AHIMA. "CPHI."

[3] AHIMA. "Value of AHIMA-Certified Employees."

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