

Advocacy Continues amid a Sea of Change

[Save to myBoK](#)

by **Don Asmonga**, MBA

Over the past several months, Washington, DC, has seen a lot of changes—a new president, a new White House staff, key federal appointees, and more than 50 freshman members of the House and Senate.

However, even among this change, AHIMA expects some of its key advocacy issues such as health IT, privacy, work force, and Medicare and Medicaid reform to be taken up by Congress and the new administration in the coming year. This article outlines where each issue stands to date from our work throughout 2008.

Work Remains on HIM Work Force

AHIMA continued its work force advocacy on Capitol Hill in 2008 by working to move the 10,000 Trained by 2010 Act (HR 1467) forward. This legislation passed the House by voice vote on June 6, 2007. It was then forwarded to the Senate, where it was referred to the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee. However, it failed to receive any legislative action.

Throughout 2008 AHIMA and its advocacy partner, the American Medical Informatics Association (AMIA), worked steadily with HR 1467's sponsor Representative David Wu (D-OR) and the chairman of the House Science and Technology Committee, Representative Bart Gordon (D-TN) to persuade the Senate HELP Committee to discharge HR 1467 from consideration so it could be sent to the president. This did not occur.

In 2009 the AHIMA-AMIA Advocacy Committee will continue to advocate for a reintroduced version of the 10,000 Trained by 2010 Act and seek to include it in alternate legislative packages.

Progress on Privacy

AHIMA continued to provide expertise and effort on privacy, confidentiality, and security issues in 2008. After approximately 13 years of hard work, AHIMA was thrilled to see the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act (GINA) signed into law. Over the years AHIMA members have sent thousands of letters supporting this bill, and AHIMA staff have spent countless hours working on its behalf.

Now that GINA is law, AHIMA is helping develop the GINA regulations. AHIMA submitted a response to a December 9 request for information from the Departments of Health and Human Services, Labor, and Treasury. These comments are available on AHIMA's Web site at www.ahima.org/dc.

AHIMA encountered other privacy policy matters through its work on health IT and health information exchange legislation. In 2008 Congress discussed three major health IT bills:

- Wired for Health Care Quality Act (S. 1693), which was considered and reported from the Senate HELP Committee
- Protecting Records, Optimizing Treatment, and Easing Communication through Healthcare Technology Act (HR 6357), which was considered and reported from the House Energy and Commerce Committee and referred to the House Ways and Means Committee
- Health-e Information Technology Act (HR 6898), which was referred to the House Ways and Means Committee, the House Energy and Commerce Committee, and the House Science and Technology Committee but not considered

None of these bills passed its respective committees, but AHIMA expects to see them or some variation of them in 2009. In all likelihood, health IT legislation will be a component of a major healthcare reform proposal, which is expected early in 2009.

A Big Step for ICD-10

Finally, 2008 saw the publication of two critically important proposed rules: implementation of ICD-10-CM and ICD-10-PCS and an update of the HIPAA transaction standard from version 4010 to version 5010.

AHIMA has advocated strongly for the need to upgrade from ICD-9 for years. Comments on each notice of proposed rule making were due to the Department of Health and Human Services on October 21, 2008.

One of the most controversial issues with the proposed rule was the final implementation date. Health and Human Services proposed October 1, 2011. AHIMA maintained its position that it would take three years from the effective date of the final rule to implement ICD-10. Therefore, its comments recommended an implementation date of October 1, 2012.

With the January publication of the final rule and its deadline of 2013, we now know what will be required to move forward with the use of ICD-10.

AHIMA's comments to the proposed rule can be found at www.ahima.org/dc. Comments on the final rule will be available early this month.

New Administration, New Introductions

The 2008 elections resulted in a wave of change that will require AHIMA to conduct a major introductory effort. AHIMA has begun the year by introducing the association and its component state associations to Congress and the new administration. This is also an important time to reintroduce AHIMA to returning members of Congress. The introductory efforts include:

- Letters to all members of the House and Senate
- Draft introductory letters for component state associations to send to their specific members of the House and the Senate (see www.ahima.org/dc)
- Introductory meetings with select committees and members of the House and Senate

This year's Hill Day on March 24 also will play a part in AHIMA's introductory and advocacy efforts. It is a great opportunity for AHIMA members to come to Washington, visit their congressional offices, and gain introductions with policy makers and their staff. Members can become the home contact for the offices of their elected officials on issues related to HIM and health IT. AHIMA's 2008 Hill Day attracted 170 attendees from 38 states and the District of Columbia who met with 213 different Congressional offices.

To prepare attendees for Hill Day, AHIMA will hold an in-depth policy briefing at the conclusion of Team Talks on March 23. The policy briefing enables participants to obtain up-to-date information on the issues of the day and to ask questions on any issue where they might have concerns.

During last year's Hill Day visits AHIMA members expressed support for the following items:

- Medicare Recovery Audit Contractor Moratorium Act
- 10,000 Trained by 2010 Act
- Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act
- Adoption of ICD-10-CM/PCS
- Healthcare Information Technology Enterprise Integration Act

Does Hill Day have an impact? Each of these issues achieved some level of success last year. For example, the Medicare RAC Moratorium Act picked up 20 additional cosponsors within weeks of AHIMA's Hill Day visits. Of these 20 cosponsors, 14 were from offices that met with AHIMA members. That is a great example of how influential AHIMA members can be when they reach out to their representatives. To learn more about this year's 2009 Hill Day, visit www.ahima.org/dc/hilldayinfo.asp.

AHIMA also held a Hill Day with AMIA on December 17. AHIMA and AMIA representatives met with key offices working on HIM and health IT issues, including the House Ways and Means Committee, the House Science and Technology Committee, and the House Energy and Commerce Committee.

Change is ever-present in Washington. With congressional elections, we deal with some element of change every two years. But 2009 seems to have ushered in both major change and the desire for change. We hope you will join us this year in working for HIM issues that offer improved access to care, quality of care, and administrative efficiencies.

Don Asmonga (don.asmonga@ahima.org) is director of government relations at AHIMA.

Driving the Power of Knowledge

Copyright 2022 by The American Health Information Management Association. All Rights Reserved.