

Advocating for Patients: Critical Care Nurse Makes the Move to e-HIM Future

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by Meg Featheringham, Assistant Editor

As a former critical care nurse, Stacie Durkin, MBA, RNC, RHIA, director of data integration at Just Associates, knows firsthand what it means to provide quality care to patients. “I’ve been in critical care for over 25 years and formally entered HIM in ’98,” she explains. “I just thought that the two married well in being an advocate for the patient and being sure that their data is where it needs to be, so that the patient gets the best care possible.”

Durkin moved from nursing to HIM because she saw the shift toward electronic health information management coming. “I saw that we were moving in the direction of being able to share [information],” she says. “Patients needed to have their information shared across the continuum of care. In nursing you have that direct interaction with the patients, and yet you don’t have as much control over their information and how the information is being given out. I saw that the future for nursing informatics and HIM was together.”

Keeping up with IT

Durkin has focused on health IT since transitioning to HIM. “I took a lot of IT classes,” she says. The courses include on-the-job training with various applications and technologies, as well as classes for her master’s degree in computer health information resource management. “It’s always changing,” she says of the technology field.

She keeps updated on the ever-evolving world of IT through more classes. “Because of my certifications, I need continuing education in that area. So I work as a member of HIMSS and [take] online college classes or special offerings in IT,” Durkin explains. She’s also gained invaluable experience in the various roles she has filled. “I have worked as an MPI specialist, an analyst, and an integration engineer,” she says. It’s in this last position where she was involved in a data exchange project.

Sharing Information

In her previous position, Durkin was involved in one of the pay-for-performance demonstration projects for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. “They are sharing data between the hospital and the physicians,” she says, “and it will eventually branch out into physicians that are not associated with the hospital in a geographic region.”

One of the key hurdles to sharing data with other entities is accurate patient matching, she says. “I think what’s going to happen is as more and more entities try to share data, they’re going to have to be sure that their databases are clean before they send information out about a patient,” Durkin explains. “And then we have to come up with something that is going to work for the matching methodology. What is that going to be, and how is that going to work?”

As for those who are wary of the IT aspect of e-HIM®, Durkin says that HIM professionals need to assert themselves in the implementation process. “They need to know that we are truly the experts to help make the IT piece work because we understand the flow of the patient through the system, why that’s important, and what regulations we need to comply with.”

Durkin suggests that HIM professionals “jump out” and get involved in health IT implementation. “You will be very surprised how important your knowledge base is to the success of the implementation,” she says. “And just remember that if we all knew the same thing then we wouldn’t be sitting at the table. There’d be no reason for us all to be there.”

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