

# All You Need to Build a Better PPE: PPE Best Practice Guide Helps Keep HIM Students Up To Speed

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By Sarah Sheber

Just as the HIM field has continued to develop and expand with the arrival of new technologies and applications for health information, the number of students enrolling in HIM programs continues to grow at a steady pace. With student enrollment rising, the necessity for additional professional practice experience (PPE) sites increases as well.

To help fill this need and encourage prospective PPE site volunteers, AHIMA has developed a best-practice guide for hosting a meaningful PPE. The HIM Higher Education and Workforce House of Delegates Team has completed the third version of this document, the "Clinical Practice Sites/Professional Practice Experience (PPE) Guide." The guide functions as a comprehensive document to outline best practices for students, programs, and affiliation sites to work together in the creation of meaningful first-hand experiences for HIM students within a practice environment.

Student participation in field positions remains a vital part of successful HIM education and career development. As a required component of education programs, these experiences contribute to continued effective development of the HIM workforce.

## Keeping Pace in the HIM Landscape

Initial review of the PPE guide began in response to the updated accreditation standards for HIM associate and baccalaureate degree programs from the Commission on Accreditation for Health Informatics and Information Management Education (CAHIIM), published in 2011. The new version of the guide contains updated language and all revisions necessary to maintain compliance with the latest standards, including a revised section to define the professional practice experience and provide guidelines for successful policy development.

In accordance with the US Department of Labor (DOL) criteria for unpaid internships as components of a larger academic experience, the guide makes the recommendation "for each HIM program to establish a formal Professional Practice Experience (PPE) policy to share with their affiliation-sites that defines the critical components of the DOL's criteria." Key elements of an effective PPE policy include offering college credit for the course, creating expected learning outcomes for the student, and regular faculty contact with students for the duration of the PPE.

The updated guide includes several new examples of possible PPE sites and projects for students in non-traditional HIM settings, reflecting the expanding nature of the HIM field beyond the traditional clinical settings.

New examples for possible student project work are in the update as well, including projects in the advocacy arena. With recent developments such as the advent of accountable care organizations and other initiatives geared toward ICD-10 preparation, advocacy has continued to grow in importance for the HIM profession.

Possible student work in this area includes conducting research and developing surveys for ICD-10 implementation preparedness, or shadowing members of Congress and other legislative officials.

Acknowledging issues identified by CAHIIM, the AHIMA Foundation, and the education community, the updated guide includes more emphasis on distance education programs and addresses the growing number of graduate-level HIM degree programs. The guide also takes into account the nature of the evolving PPE with possibilities for a more open approach to program length and content.

While the traditional PPE took place entirely on site, a more efficient emerging method is the hybrid PPE, described in the guide as "providing the best of both worlds for the student." This hybrid method offers part of the PPE in an off-site lab

setting. With the majority of skill development taking place in a lab, field experience time is easier to manage and offers greater flexibility for practice sites.

While skill labs allow students to gain experience in applied practice, maintaining the field-based element of the PPE provides students with vital exposure to the work environment- where they learn to build important relationships and begin developing professional sensibilities. In addition to other strategies discussed in the guide, this approach could be especially helpful in a rural setting where PPE participation opportunities may be more limited.

Other guide revisions centered on the development of a successful PPE for students covered the importance of work behaviors and consideration of student feedback.

## **Tips for a Meaningful PPE**

### **1. Responsibilities prior to the PPE:**

- a. Review affiliate agreement with human resources, legal counsel, or required departments
- b. Review students' resumes and work experience
- c. Prepare student schedule of activities
- d. Identify departmental site preceptor and mentor(s)
- e. Prepare written description of any projects (if applicable)
- f. Arrange for the following: facility identification, parking instructions, employee orientation (if applicable), information systems access, and any additional facility-specific requirements

### **2. Responsibilities at the beginning of the PPE:**

- a. Provide an organizational chart of the department and facility
- b. Provide departmental policies and procedures
- c. Provide a facility tour
- d. Introduce students to all members of the HIM department, including those individuals students may report to
- e. Review expectations-your expectations of the students and their expectations of you
- f. Assign a PPE Supervisor (and backup supervisor in case of primary supervisor illness or absence) and provide student with contact information (phone number and e-mail address)

## **Examples of Projects for the Student**

1. Create a plan for ICD-10 implementation for the health information department.
2. Create new quality indicators for the file area or scanned records, and the methodology to implement them.
3. Perform audits of the chart locator reports to determine if any charts are delinquent. Identify the criteria, perform the audit, summarize the findings and make recommendations.
4. Perform a data collection for a state-mandated reporting requirement. This could mean collecting data by diagnosis or by lab result, summarizing per-state requirements, and submitting results appropriately.
5. Utilize a database for searching and summarizing the results of a clinical review and present findings at a regional or state HIMA meeting.
6. Assist in the coordination of an external audit: identify and pull the records needed, coordinate the copying, and track each document through the process of submitting the audit, providing a spreadsheet of data elements to allow tracking as audit results are returned.
7. Work with one of the state representatives of MyPHR, and design and perform the teaching to a specified group in conjunction with the representative.
8. Perform an audit of the productivity of a specified functional area; files, coding, record completion, etc. Research benchmark standards for use in comparison. Summarize and make recommendations. This would also be a good project for one school program to do in multiple facilities, sharing the findings among the participating HIM programs. The project could also involve the creation of a local benchmark.

9. In an EHR clinic setting, create a multidisciplinary documentation format that can also be used in paper form during downtime.
10. Research and report on found protocols to support secondary data uses in the areas of research, quality reporting, and public health. Compare the faculty protocols to other available protocols-what is missing and what could be modified?

Source: Clinical Practice Sites/Professional Practice Experience (PPE) Guide, Version III, AHIMA

## Taking Steps Toward the Future of HIM

The guide is currently available on the Faculty Resources page of the AHIMA Web site at [www.ahima.org/schools/facresources/ppe.aspx](http://www.ahima.org/schools/facresources/ppe.aspx). Along with the full guide, the Web site also includes information regarding opportunities for practitioners to sign up as a PPE site manager.

AHIMA believes that serving as a PPE site manager offers current practitioners the chance to give back to the profession's foundation of continuous, constructive learning and development by helping mentor and strengthen future HIM leaders. Credentialed practitioners serving as site managers have the opportunity to earn CEU credits towards the annual requirement. The latest details for the CEU claim process are included in the updated guide.

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