

Are You Ready for the E-health Revolution?

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by Barbara Odom-Wesley, PhD, RHIA

Are you ready for the revolution? The e-health revolution, that is. E-health is a new frontier to explore and conquer. According to AHIMA's E-health Task Force, there is an increasing sense of urgency to move the healthcare industry into the electronic information age. The Internet and its derived technologies have revolutionized the way business is conducted and have already transformed healthcare in several areas, including consumer access to health Web sites and online personal health records.

There are also external forces urging healthcare to forge ahead with technological advances, including the newly formed National Alliance for Health Information Technology, of which AHIMA is a founding member.

Healthcare's Role

Healthcare trails almost every other field in terms of the application of information technology, partially because of a lack of consistent and uniform standards and protocols. As a result, healthcare information technology is fragmented, with isolated systems and databases. The adoption and application of information technology is essential to reform healthcare and to meet the needs of patients in the coming decades.

By harnessing the power of information technology for the healthcare field, we can meet these growing demands and achieve patient-centered coordinated care, advance quality and patient safety, increase work force productivity and satisfaction, streamline billing and administrative systems, efficiently manage assets and resources, and meet consumer expectations for service and access to information.

A Revolutionary Vision

The E-health Task Force has been working the last three years to develop and communicate the e-health information management (e-HIM) vision to AHIMA members. It has also been communicating the benefit of HIM professionals' skills to the e-health industry. For example, one landmark was the 2000 publication of the report "AHIMA's Recommendations to Ensure Privacy and Quality of Personal Health Information on the Internet."

The task force conducted an e-HIM roles and function study and provided numerous articles and presentations to educate our membership. It is now moving to a Community of Practice and concluding its work with recommendations to continue promoting HIM professionals and preparing all of us for the impending revolution.

Be a Part of the Revolution

AHIMA has laid a foundation through the work of the E-health Task Force and will continue to address it through strategic initiatives. But what can individual members do to solidify the HIM professional as a vital participant in the development and implementation of this new electronic environment?

HIM professionals already embrace the pursuit of lifelong learning. All of us should visit the E-health CoP and review the resources posted there. Here, we can study the work of the task force and develop an understanding of e-health organizations, functions, and the role of HIM.

AHIMA is forming alliances with national groups involved in developing standards for the electronic health record. Locally, each of us can identify where thinking about e-health is taking place. Align with those on the cutting edge and if no group exists, why not start one? When it is time to make the move, we must be in the right place.

HIM professionals who understand and embrace this technology will harness and direct it to improve health information and the efficacy of healthcare. Those who fail to understand and embrace this technology will be left behind and their opportunities will be forfeited to faster-moving, better-focused professionals.

Be ready for the revolution.

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