

# Becoming a New Voice in HIM

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by Jessica Squazzo, assistant editor

“I became a strong advocate for HIM when I was a junior [in college],” she says. “I really wanted to give HIM a voice and create awareness for it.”

—Erin Blume, RHIA, director of quality management at The Ambassador Health System

Not too many recent college graduates land a position as director of quality management at a long-term care facility. Then again, not too many recent graduates are like Erin Blume, RHIA. Even before starting her position as director of quality management at The Ambassador Health System in Omaha, NE, Blume was entering the HIM field with leaps and bounds.

## A Perfect Fit

Blume, who won the 2001 Triumph Awards New Frontier Award, began her HIM career when she decided she wanted to work in healthcare but didn’t want to be a healthcare provider. She earned a scholarship to the College of Saint Mary in Omaha, NE, and decided to begin the four-year accredited HIM degree program there after a family member suggested the field might suit her. Shortly after Blume began her studies, she found out that HIM was in fact a good fit. “It wasn’t until I started my solid HIM classes that I knew this is what I wanted to do,” she says.

Extracurricular activities also got Blume more involved with HIM and gave her a first chance at becoming an advocate for the profession. One of these activities was founding the college’s HIM club, Sigma Rho Lambda. Among other club activities, Blume and other club members helped plan an annual Health Information Week, a weeklong campaign to raise awareness about the profession on campus.

## Lifelong Learning

Besides educating others about the field, Blume is dedicated to continually educating herself, something she hasn’t stopped doing since graduation. “When you’re out of school, you still have to be a student,” she says. One of these platforms for education is her job, where she is constantly challenged by having to learn new aspects of a changing field.

As director of quality management at The Ambassador, a three-facility system that focuses on subacute and rehabilitative care, Blume oversees three HIM departments, the corporate compliance program, and the corporate performance improvement program. Included in these responsibilities are conducting fraud and abuse investigations and implementing HIPAA.

She has been working at The Ambassador since 1998, where she started as a health information associate, became a health information and improvement coordinator in 2000 (both while still a full-time student), and then came into her current role in May 2001. Blume credits her varied work experience with her understanding of HIM as a whole. “It’s really liberating to work with people who see the big picture—we all affect each other,” she says.

## An Advocate for HIM

Being an advocate for HIM is part of Blume’s current job at the Ambassador. “I use my position as a forum to demonstrate what HIM professionals do,” she says. She hopes to demonstrate this to young people who are considering entering the field, a group of people she feels are sometimes neglected when it comes to spreading the word about HIM.

Blume says that if students were made more aware of the abundant opportunities available in the field, they would surely be interested. “If they knew how many different directions they could go in they would jump right in,” she says. Stronger public

relations campaigns to colleges and high schools and making school career counselors more aware of the field could help pique the interest of more future HIM professionals, according to Blume.

As for Blume's personal future goals, she plans on going back to school for further education ("sooner than later," she says), and hopes to eventually become more involved in education and public speaking.

A word of advice to students considering the field: be willing to work hard. As a potential future leader of HIM, Blume may be a hard act to follow.

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