

# Bringing HIM to Consumers

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By Patty Thierry Sheridan, MBA, RHIA, FAHIMA

Each year I look forward to my annual spring break ski vacation in Steamboat Springs, Colorado. It's a great time to recharge batteries and gather with friends to celebrate spring break and share our passion for health information management.

On the way to Steamboat this year, one of my fellow skiers opened the in-flight magazine to find an article about electronic health records titled "Portal of Good Health." Being an HIM professional, the article caught her attention-especially since it was in such a mainstream airline publication.

Articles such as this one, read by travelers at 30,000 feet, illustrate how consumers are becoming savvy health information users and competent students of electronic health records. While I listened to my friend summarize the article, I couldn't help but think of the thousands of people who have read this article and yet may not be aware of the role HIM professionals play in ensuring the accuracy and trustworthiness of their health information.

## New Focus on Consumer Education

As HIM professionals move further into stewardship roles that transition the custody of health information to consumers, it becomes more important than ever that each and every one of us engage our neighbors, family, and friends in a dialogue about the management of health information. Teaching consumers to manage their health information is the responsibility of the HIM profession.

The need is apparent. Research indicates that about 9 in 10 adults have problems using health information effectively. Consumers are repeatedly telling us that information is presented to them in a way that is difficult to understand. We have a chance to make a difference by helping consumers feel connected to their health information. It's time to bring HIM practices closer to home. It's time for HIM to become a household acronym.

In support of that effort, AHIMA's Consumer Health Practice Council, composed of industry leaders, is working on pressing consumer-facing issues such as privacy and security, portals, m-Health, health literacy issues PHRs, and new government regulations that include consumers in meaningful use and data access.

The council also guides AHIMA's consumer awareness campaigns and provides input on the design and content included in our consumer-oriented Web site, [www.myphr.org](http://www.myphr.org). The site received more than 100,000 visits in the past year, and I know we will draw more visitors as we each make an effort to continue engaging consumers in the HIM dialogue. MyPHR.org is rich with resources and helpful ideas to aid consumers in managing their health information.

When skiing, I have found that it is best to always look at least two turns ahead, scanning for a good path among the many options. Consumer engagement is a new role for many of us. It's an opportunity that requires us to look ahead and plan our turns in order to perform our roles well.

When we do that, consumers will recognize us as representatives of a profession that provides leadership in consumer health information management, assuring the privacy, accuracy, and trustworthiness of their health information. Dream big!

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