

Bringing Information Governance to the Healthcare Realm

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by Anne Zender

Today, healthcare organizations are investing in information technology (IT) at unprecedented rates. And IT is generating more data-of all kinds-than ever before. What's needed now, says Linda Kloss, RHIA, FAHIMA, is for healthcare organizations to invest in ways to manage, control, and understand all that data. To succeed, they will need an information governance strategy.

Kloss, principal of Kloss Strategic Advisors and AHIMA's former CEO, called on HIM professionals to step up to the current data integrity challenge during Thursday's AHIMA Health Information Integrity Summit in Chicago, IL.

The Economist has defined information governance as an enterprisewide framework that defines how information is controlled, accessed, and used, as well as the mechanisms that enforce it. Developing a strategy, Kloss said, starts with policy. "We look for a tool to fix the problem, but the problem really is a policy problem. We should be thinking of policy first, then moving forward," she said.

Change the Culture

Disturbing recent headlines describing medical errors, data breaches, identity theft, and improper claims payment are all indicators of a need for better information governance in healthcare, Kloss said. Outside healthcare, however, other sectors have already found successful routes to information governance. The first step, Kloss said, is developing a culture that believes information is an asset that needs to be managed at an enterprisewide level. "We need to understand that information is what we rely on for good decision making," she said.

Changing underlying cultural assumptions requires investment and organization. For instance, organizations should "look beyond the electronic health record" and think more broadly about what needs to be managed. Organizations should agree first on concepts, then on definitions and principles, and then on policies and practice guidelines, Kloss said.

It's a lot of work, but information governance does bring benefits. An *Economist* survey found that corporations around the world cited including better decision making, improved business results, and improved ability to protect sensitive data as benefits of an enterprisewide governance strategy.

'Words Matter'

HIM professionals are key to setting information governance strategy, and they may find themselves selling it to the rest of their organizations. To that end, it's important to frame the issue properly. "Words matter," Kloss emphasized. For instance, she observed that some CEOs "don't like the term 'governance,'" so in those cases, a different term such as "policy framework" may be more successful.

Kloss said she also prefers the term "information governance" over "data governance" because information governance is the broadest, most accepted concept in other industries outside healthcare. Information governance encompasses both data and IT governance.

It's also important to position information governance as a strategic issue for the future and to avoid getting pigeonholed. For example, "If you start down a governance path and it is very compliance-oriented, it is not seen as a senior-level strategic issue," Kloss said. Rather, position it as "we need it to help people trust data to make better decisions quickly-don't lead with compliance," she said.

Getting Started

Kloss offered some general recommendations on how to foster one's own information governance program, including:

- Create a vision. It's hard to drive change without it.
- Convene a steering committee and assign key roles. Conduct an assessment and decide where to invest to get going. "It's a tough project to juggle," Kloss said, but perhaps other ongoing projects like ICD-10 implementation can be levers of change.
- Develop a time frame. This will be shaped by initiatives like meaningful use, ICD-10, and healthcare reform, to name a few.
- Take an incremental approach. "Identify a short list and areas where we can have an impact," Kloss said. The strategy can be formalized as it evolves. The goal, Kloss said, is "valued information assets that are in control."

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