

Change and Transformation

Save to myBoK

by Susan Helbig, MA, RHIA

The HIM profession has evolved over the last several decades, and AHIMA's surveys of focus groups on the HIM profession's image reflects that evolution. February 2000 and 2002 results showed that respondents saw HIM professionals as clerical (44 percent). In 2003, however, nearly half (48 percent) responded administrative, and only 26 percent chose clerical.

The 2003 results also found positive movement in questions about our professionalism, education, promotability, and initiative and analytical ability. The group ranked HIM professionals as more professional, highly educated, promotable, and likely to take initiative than either of the earlier samples. AHIMA believes the positive movement occurred at least in part because of HIM professionals' involvement in the HIPAA and EHR initiatives.

It's almost 2007, and many of us can no longer remember a time when the EHR was not an integral part of our professional vocabulary. The concept of a computerized medical record originated sometime back in the 1960s and '70s. In the 1980s, we learned about computerized master patient indexes, computerized financial systems, stand-alone word processors, and DRGs that computed far faster with a computer than by hand and calculator. In the 1990s, the Institute of Medicine released its report, "The Computer-Based Patient Record: An Essential Technology for Health Care," and thus began the new impetus for EHR implementation.

We are almost tired of hearing about change, and yet change is a constant in both our professional and personal lives. We have options in how we process new knowledge and new demands and how we choose to position ourselves in the present and the future. In this ever-changing profession and environment, HIM professionals must establish their approach to transition and transformation.

Choosing Your Path

When confronted with change, HIM professionals must choose how to handle it. Here are eight possible actions when confronted by change:

- Leave the field
- Rail against change
- Drag your feet and resist change
- Be swept along by others
- Be a willing participant
- Start the transformation in your own practice environment
- Become a leader promoting change and assisting others
- Envision new possibilities and new directions and share them with others

During any work week, we may find ourselves in one or more of these stances. However, to make choices, one must first assess where one is. By performing a self-assessment, we can determine which stance we are taking and make a conscious choice for the stance we prefer.

Upon reflecting on your work week, you may find that when you chose to be a willing participant, you enjoyed the process. You may also have noticed that others enjoyed the process as well. Regardless of your professional role, there is a certain excitement in beginning processes that transform practice.

Reinventing Ourselves

To start a transformation within your own practice environment, you need a clear vision of where you want or need to end up. The more details you can envision and communicate to others, the more graceful the actual implementation process will be.

These specific details need to include both the process to move toward the vision as well as the desired end state. A major part of transformation is enlisting others, not only to support the process but also to provide their own expertise and commitment. To create support and commitment, you must clearly articulate the process and goals and share your excitement of what this change means for your organization, including the beneficial effects on patient care.

How do we as individuals prepare and maintain ourselves for a state of continuous change? Sometimes it is necessary to reinvent ourselves. There are many ways to do this: seeking specific technical knowledge and skills in the area of change (EHR, RHIOs, ICD-10, computer-assisted coding); reading and taking coursework outside your professional domain; sharing your knowledge and skills with HIM colleagues and others outside the profession, both within and outside the organization in which you work-feeding your spirit in whatever way nourishes you.

We all feel more alive when we are engaged in a process or communication with others about something important to us. Sometimes, reinvention of the self is as simple as remembering why we are doing what we are doing. For HIM professionals, this means providing quality information so that quality healthcare can take place for the patients we serve. Conscious choices and committed intention create the possibility of transformation. We can choose to opt in for change.

Additional Reading

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