

# Change is the Constant: HIM Directors Must Bridge Past and Future

Save to myBoK

*by Chris Dimick*

Electronic systems do more than change processes. They change people, in both the way they conduct and view their HIM work.

That means reimagining roles and, for directors, serving as a sturdy bridge between the past and the future as the department restructures its work and finds a new identity.

## Redesigning, Reinventing Roles

“HIM people have to reinvent the way they do their work,” says Mary Reeves, RHIA. “We have to ask, ‘What do we bring?’ Then we have to change our roles.” In her own department, Reeves says, that change involves taking “a more qualitative approach and looking at the quality of the data.”

Reeves is director of medical information services at Vanderbilt University Hospital in Nashville, TN. The hospital was a paper factory when Reeves first started work there 23 years ago. But in the mid-’90s, Vanderbilt began implementing components of an electronic record system. Reeves was on the ground floor. Her role has been changing ever since, and it always will, a fact she accepted long ago.

One of the biggest challenges for directors during this transition is implementing the changes while showing the industry that HIM professionals remain essential in managing health information, Reeves says. In order to position her department for the future, Reeves played a central role in completely redesigning its roles. Every job description was rewritten to better reflect the digital environment.

This work began three years ago. Today every redesigned job has been phased into practice. “We changed titles, changed the content of what people do, and changed from a very clerical-type, task-driven role to the more qualitative approach of doing things,” she says. Requirements changed, too; the new jobs require more advanced skills and credentials.

## Communicating Challenges and Benefits

Change can bring high stress and low morale to a staff. That was a real possibility at Vanderbilt, says Reeves. But with good management, the department, which numbers about 100 full-time equivalents, remained mostly stable and happy.

“This constantly changing environment can be very unsettling to people because a lot of times they don’t know what their roles are,” she says. “You have to communicate and be sure they understand how things are changing in your department.”

Being honest and offering incentives for change can win over an anxious staff. “One of the most important things we have done is try to stabilize and keep the staff feeling good about their job security and future,” she says.

“When we have had to make changes, we have told people ‘This job, in the future, is going to require a credential. If you want to have your job you may have to go back to school, you are going to have to work toward this.’”

Moving systems online produced unqualified boosts in job satisfaction. Some of Vanderbilt’s HIM staff could work from home or have more flexible hours. The change increased the staff satisfaction rating to its highest levels on an annual Vanderbilt survey, Reeves says.

The new systems also improved job functions, making the work more meaningful. HIM directors need to make these positive changes clear during any implementation. How jobs will improve should be at the forefront of conversation.

After all, change never stops. Before any major implementation, Reeves says, it is best for HIM directors to remember this and prepare for both the literal and the emotional impact.

That mentality was summed up well by a colleague of Reeves who once uttered a phrase that became Reeves's e-HIM® motto. In short—the way it was is not the way it is, and the way it is is not the way it will be.

## The Library Is Open

EHR implementations are journeys, and HIM professionals have unique data management expertise to offer at each step along the way. They are links between the paper-based present and the digital future.

There is always plenty to learn. When you're in need of some e-HIM expertise, the FORE Library: HIM Body of Knowledge is open. You'll find articles, practice briefs, and tools 24 hours a day, including Web-only extras, many developed by industry experts who serve on AHIMA work groups and practice councils.

Log on through myAHIMA at [www.ahima.org](http://www.ahima.org). You can search by keyword and browse by topic.

**Chris Dimick** ([chris.dimick@ahima.org](mailto:chris.dimick@ahima.org)) is staff writer at the Journal of AHIMA.

### Article citation:

Dimick, Chris. "Change is the Constant: HIM Directors Must Bridge Past and Future" *Journal of AHIMA* 78, no.9 (October 2007): 88.

Driving the Power of Knowledge

Copyright 2022 by The American Health Information Management Association. All Rights Reserved.