

Checking the Radar as the New Year Begins

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As health information managers, our radar screens are as full as those of air traffic controllers at O'Hare Airport. In the cover story that follows, AHIMA's talented staff select 12 hot topics to watch in 2008, from regulations and standards to emerging e-HIM practices.

From the National Agenda...

Electing the next president of the United States will dominate the political scene, making it less likely that new legislation will be passed this year. However, as our staff in Washington, DC, has taught me over the years, an election year is an important time to advance policies and positions with the new administration and new Congress.

This year, the AHIMA team—staff and volunteer leaders—will be doing its best to advance sound action on five fronts:

- Improved quality of health data and coding
- The HIM work force
- Health information exchange
- Confidentiality, privacy, and security of health information
- Greater understanding of HIM and its issues and the work of AHIMA

One issue that will receive a lot of attention this year is the design and launch of the private-sector successor to the American Health Information Community (AHIC). Created in 2005, AHIC is a federal advisory body chartered with issuing recommendations to the Department of Health and Human Services on how to make health records digital and interoperable.

Secretary of Health and Human Services Michael Leavitt is seeking to reestablish this body as a highly credible public-private entity by the fall of 2008 so that momentum on this organization's important agenda is not disrupted by political change. It is a bold goal and substantial challenge to balance stakeholder interests and create such a sustainable entity. AHIMA leaders will be working vigorously to ensure that the HIM perspective is appropriately represented in the work of the AHIC successor.

...to Local Communities

Most of the action on healthcare reform this year will occur at state and local levels. Healthcare quality, safety, cost, and access are important policy priorities for state legislatures and governors. Communities are finding ways to exchange health information, and healthcare organizations are stitching together longitudinal views of their patients to improve care.

As Dan Rode notes in his preceding column, this year offers many opportunities to get involved in these critical issues at the local and regional levels. Get involved in your state and local health reform projects. Their sponsors may not know they need the HIM expertise—or even that there is a field with this expertise—but they do, and you can help advance the HIM agenda in 2008 by stepping forward.

Finally, help spread the word about AHIMA's "It's HI Time, America!" PHR campaign and direct people to learn more about PHRs by visiting www.MyPHR.com.

We invite you to join in this discussion about what to expect in 2008 by posting a comment in the discussion thread "The Year Ahead in HIM" on the AHIMA Community of Practice. Authors and member experts will be online to discuss the issues and how you might approach them in your work.

Here's wishing you a very happy, healthy, and productive New Year.

Article citation:

Kloss, Linda L. "Checking the Radar as the New Year Begins" *Journal of AHIMA* 79, no.1 (January 2008): 25.

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