

# Coding Worldwide: Gain a Global Perspective with IFHRO

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*by Kathy Brouch, RHIA, CCS*

Many HIM professionals may not know that there is an international health records organization, but the International Federation of Health Records Organizations (IFHRO) has been in existence since 1968.

The Federation presents great opportunities for AHIMA members who wish to become involved with coding issues and topics on a global scale. Staying current on the Federation's activity and topics of discussion can provide useful information for AHIMA members.

## What Is IFHRO?

IFHRO's purposes are to promote the development and use of health records (both paper and electronic) in all countries, advance the development and use of international health records standards, provide for the exchange of information on health records education requirements and training programs, and provide opportunities for communication among people working in the HIM field all over the world.<sup>1</sup>

Almost 50 years ago at the First International Congress on Medical Records in London an international records federation was proposed.<sup>2</sup> Following the fifth International Congress, the International Federation of Medical Records Organizations, now IFHRO, was founded.

As a non-governmental organization in official relations with the World Health Organization (WHO), the Federation has representation at WHO meetings and is allowed to participate in projects related to the field of health records and information systems. It brings together national associations that have been formed to improve health or medical record practices in their countries. Today there are 23 national members.

## IFHRO in Action

The Federation's newsletter keeps readers aware of its activities. In general, the newsletter's goal is to provide information about health records activities in member countries and educational articles on the latest health information standards and technology. Topics covered in the past year have included:

- the implementation of the International Classification of Diseases, 10th Revision, Canada (ICD-10-CA) and the Canadian Classification of Health Interventions (CCI)
- a report on a special continuing education training program in cancer registry for HIM professionals in Israel
- a description of the model of Chinese health record management

Two articles provided updates on the activity of the European Task Group on Harmonization of Health Information Management (ETG). This group aims to establish cooperation between countries in the European community and countries that wish to join the community. The following list of objectives have been established for this task group:<sup>3</sup>

- facilitate standardization of policies and procedures
- incorporate education and qualification structures
- establish a forum for the exchange of knowledge and information for HIM professionals
- supply the European Union (EU) with a clear picture of the current status quo in respect to HIM
- aid the EU in the development of future policies and procedures
- facilitate the development of a transferable work force in the HIM field

## The Federation's Structure

The general assembly is the governing body of the Federation. It is made up of one director appointed by each national member association. The general assembly meets at the international congress and elects the members of the executive committee and other committees and task groups.

The executive committee is considered to be the governing body of the Federation. The constitution calls for seven members of the general assembly, a president, a president-elect, a secretary/treasurer, and four directors (one from each of the regions) to make up the executive committee. The four regions are Europe, the Americas, Africa, the Eastern Mediterranean and South East Asia, and the Western Pacific. Better representation and communication between the executive committee and the general assembly members is expected due to this regional arrangement. There are five different types of membership. See “Types of Membership,” below.

## Types of Membership

There are five categories of IFHRO membership.<sup>4</sup> Type of membership determines a member’s voting privileges as well as other responsibilities and opportunities to participate in task groups or other committees.

**National member:** National membership is limited to one association in each country, which is representative of the national activities within the field of health records. A national member has one primary representative (the director) and one alternate representative (the alternate director). As a member of the general assembly, the director has full voice and voting rights.

**Associate member:** Anyone working in the field of health records may join as an associate member and become an individual member of IFHRO. Associate members can serve on committee and task groups but do not have the right to hold office or vote.

**Affiliate member:** Affiliate membership is available for international organizations (professional or governmental), with a Federation alliance or partnership to become Federation members. Affiliate members can serve on committee and task groups, but do not have the right to hold office or vote.

**Honorary member:** Honorary membership is reserved for individuals who have earned exceptional merit in furthering the goals and interests of the Federation.

**Corporate member:** Corporate membership provides any institution, company, hospital, or other organization working in HIM or related fields to join IFHRO. Corporate members can serve on committee and task groups, but do not have the right to hold office or vote.

## How Can I Get Involved?

AHIMA will host the 14th International Health Records Congress, “Sharing Solutions in the Global Community,” in Washington, DC, in October 2004. The General Assembly meets at the time of the International Congress along with an international educational forum.

Each Congress provides an occasion to bring together member countries, other interested countries, and individuals in an international forum to participate in educational sessions and networking opportunities.

Out of the more than 40,000 AHIMA members, fewer than 50 belong to IFHRO. As an associate member there are opportunities to write an article for the newsletter or serve on committees, task groups, or projects that focus on international health information and health records. Consider becoming involved with IFHRO today and experience the benefits of reaching new international friends and colleagues before the 14th International Health Congress in Washington, DC.

## Notes

1. Hogeboom, Willem. "IFHRO Constitution Revised after Twelve Years." *International Health Records Newsletter* 10, no. 3 (December 2000): 3.
2. Watson, Phyllis J. "International Federation of Health Records Organizations (IFHRO)—Past, Present, and Future." *Journal of AHIMA* 63, no. 2 (1992): 72-74.
3. Nicholson, Lorraine. "European Task Group on Harmonisation of Health Information Management across European Boundaries." *International Health Records Newsletter* 11, no. 1 (2001): 1-2.
4. Constitution of the International Federation of Health Records Organizations. Amended September 2000.

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## For More Information on IFHRO

Several AHIMA members are already involved with IFHRO. Visit the IFHRO Web site at <http://home.quicknet.nl/qn/prive/jc.willem1/ifhro/index.htm> or contact a member below:

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