

# Compliance Officer Brings HIM Insights to Data Standards Work

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*by Kevin Heubusch, managing editor*

Data standards may seem like the work of IT specialists, but Nancy LeRoy knows that HIM can contribute valuable information about document flow and management. "The nuts and bolts of the HIM profession feed into standards work," she says.

LeRoy, BS, CCS, CCP, serves as cochair of the Health Level Seven (HL7) Medical Records/Information Management Technical Committee, which works on standards for HIM-related messaging.

## Getting Involved with HL7

HL7 is a standards development organization of healthcare and IT professionals collaborating on messaging standards for a wide variety of health information. Messaging standards enable disparate systems to share information by describing what components must be present and identifiable in a message in order for its content to be transmitted and integrated, LeRoy explains. One focus of LeRoy's committee is messaging standards for consent documentation.

Joining the committee required "jumping into the pool," because the work is ongoing as people move on and off the committees, says LeRoy, who is the HIM compliance officer at the Syracuse Veterans Administration Medical Center and its go-to person for matters relating to the Freedom of Information Act.

The first meeting was "pretty overwhelming," she relates. At the same time, it was exciting to see physicians, IT experts, and other healthcare professionals gathered around the table discussing how to advance health IT.

LeRoy says she didn't have much IT experience coming into that first meeting. Learning the committee's lingo took a couple of sessions, too, and she had to catch up before she could fully participate.

But joining in the work was made easier because LeRoy had direct experience that the committee was seeking. It had reached a point in its work where it needed to understand how consent documentation flowed. It was looking for "content people" with experience in the content of the documentation and how it is used, LeRoy says.

## HIM Contributions...and Rewards

LeRoy's HIM background helped broaden the committee's understanding of consent forms. Originally the committee looked narrowly at just surgical permissions. Now it refers to "medical legal agreements," encompassing all documents a patient must sign in the course of treatment, from HIPAA notices to consent to treat forms.

Her HIM background also helps her bring workflow experience to the committee's discussions, says LeRoy, "because [HIM professionals have] always needed to manage document completion." Issues of document access, amendment, and status can be trickier to resolve than the technical aspects of messaging, she notes.

HIM professionals can also contribute to standards work with their knowledge of the health record's legal requirements, LeRoy says. In general, they "have an overall organizational picture that a physician doesn't necessarily see, or an administrator, or the IT person. HIM is the point where all those pieces come together and create the whole."

It's exciting to use her HIM knowledge in a different way, LeRoy says, and she finds it "very fascinating to watch the [standards] work go forward." She considers her standards work a form of professional development, helping in her daily work

at the VA. Further, "stretching helps you see where your realm really is," she says. "It's a chance to see where the profession could go--needs to go."

"The field is growing so much with the EHR," LeRoy says. The magnitude of the change may be a little daunting, she acknowledges, but she finds being in on the ground floor exciting. "There's plenty of opportunity."

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