

Connecting Consumers to their Health Information

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For many years, AHIMA has been advancing a potential role for HIM professionals as facilitators for consumers and their health information. Electronic health records, mobile apps, and patient portals all impact the consumer experience.

As an industry, we have made progress—but we need to make a lot more. Early this year, two different industry surveys released the following troubling statistics:

- 46 percent of respondents who use digital health tools say the data collected by these tools is not incorporated into their healthcare¹
- 60 percent of consumers who use digital health tools say they have electronic health records, but only 22 percent are accessing their records to help make medical decisions²
- 57 percent of respondents who had contact with health IT reported being skeptical of their overall benefits because of recently reported data hacking and a perceived lack of privacy protection³
- 89 percent of respondents reported withholding health information during their visits⁴

These statistics reveal a lack of trust in the systems we've been working so hard to promote. And they reveal a lack of understanding of the ways patients and physicians can use health IT to improve care. These statistics are also the sign of an opportunity—one that HIM is in a good position to address.

In the last few years, one of AHIMA's strategic focuses has been on empowering consumers to optimize their health through management of their personal health information. This year our strategy includes "connecting consumers to their health information." For example, we plan to work in conjunction with industry partners to develop a form that will educate patients on their rights and allow them to sign and authorize the release of their information to approved parties.

This month's cover story "[Making HIPAA Work for Consumers](#)," by Mary Butler, provides best practices and advice to HIM professionals on the best way to reach consumers and help them connect with and use their health information.

Lisa Eramo offers strategies for how HIM professionals can make the transition into data analytics work for their healthcare organizations in "[Becoming a Data Master](#)." A workplace assessment conducted in 2014 showed that this is one of the biggest skills gaps facing the industry.

Finally, the industry is still absorbing the changes wrought by the Medicare Access and CHIP Reauthorization Act of 2015 (MACRA). In "[How MACRA Changes HIM](#)," Michael Marron-Stearns examines various elements of the law and explains how each will impact HIM.

AHIMA will continue to provide the tools you need to serve as an important bridge between consumers and their health information. As a profession, we can do better—and we will.

Notes

[1] Pennic, Fred. "[HealthMine Survey: Consumers' Digital Health Data Is Often Going Nowhere](#)." HIT Consultant. January 4, 2017.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Black Book Research LLC. "[Healthcare's Digital Divide Widens](#)." Press release. January 3, 2017.

[4] Ibid.

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