

Data Governance—HIM's Sweet Spot

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HIM's primary ethical obligation is to protect patient privacy and confidential information, which includes oversight of information disclosure; health information systems and health records; and the quality of information. Both paper and electronic health records contain personal and private information, which we must protect and safeguard.

This is who we are—the data stewards. Our expertise in data governance is our sweet spot. Consistently demonstrating your expertise as the data steward in your organization will pave the way for effective health data governance.

Stewardship Integral to Governance

Data governance is the high-level organizational framework or enterprise-wide infrastructure of accountability and responsibility that defines the purpose for data collection, ownership, and use. One of the critical success factors within the domain of data governance is data stewardship, which addresses the detail of data quality management—everything from process workflow, policies, and procedures to project management.

According to NCVHS's primer "Health Data Stewardship: What, Why, Who, How," health data stewardship is "a responsibility...to ensure the knowledgeable and appropriate use of data derived from individuals' personal health information." Using individuals' personal health information to improve understanding of healthcare while respecting individuals' privacy and confidentiality benefits society, according to NCVHS, and accountability is a central concept of health data stewardship.

NCVHS notes that health data stewardship is taking on greater urgency within healthcare due to the "increase in availability of electronic health data; growing recognition of the value of electronic data in improving healthcare and population health; the acceleration in the use of information and communication technology; and awareness of the potential risks associated with incorrect or inappropriate uses of health data."

The Data Steward Role

The data steward role should be a formal responsibility within organizations, ensuring appropriate use of health data with liability for inappropriate use. HIM professionals serving as the designated data steward should review the AHIMA Code of Ethics. The role of data steward is a common thread throughout the code's principles and guidelines, which can help guide HIM professionals on how to serve in this role.

A key HIM guiding principle is the interdisciplinary collaboration in situations supporting health information practice. HIM professionals are the primary drivers in raising awareness of how to safeguard personal health information. We actively lead, engage, participate in, and contribute to decisions that affect the well being of patients by drawing on the perspectives, values, and experiences of those involved in decisions related to patients.

Data stewardship is not simply a technology solution; it defines the people, policies, procedures, and technologies necessary to complement the data governance model. Professional and ethical obligations of the interdisciplinary team as a whole and of its individual members should be clearly established.

Let your organization know that you are the data steward. Your organization can count on you and your HIM department for world-class data governance.

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