

Developing an Experienced HIM Work Force

Save to myBoK

by *Melanie Brodnik, PhD, RHIA*

HIM practitioners have a long history of contributing to education by serving as site preceptors. Today, however, increased work demands and changing practice patterns limit time to train new graduates onsite. These factors are raising the demand for graduates with higher levels of experience. The importance of students acquiring additional professional practice experience (PPE) is critical in today's job market.

This need to develop experienced HIM professionals is changing curriculum in academic programs. Programs must incorporate more problem-based learning, practice simulations, cooperative learning, and team activities. And they must make the acquisition of clinical affiliation sites in a variety of work settings a priority in HIT and HIA programs.

Additional PPE Opportunities

PPE opportunities also exist in career-entry (or career-progression) internship or fellowship programs. These programs can serve as post-degree training for new graduates or professional self-development opportunities for practitioners. Internships and fellowships enable an individual to enhance knowledge and skills while translating theory into action under the direction of a mentor.

An example of such a program is currently offered by the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA).¹ The VA has created a Career Intern Program that prepares HIT and HIA credential-eligible graduates and credentialed practitioners for HIM positions in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). The internship is a paid, full-time position for two years under the guidance of an experienced HIM professional. The program benefits the VHA in developing and mentoring individuals who may fulfill future professional staff needs. It benefits the individual in terms of personal growth and professional development.

Another program model to consider is the Mentor Fellowship Program offered by the North American Association of Central Cancer Registries.² This program is designed to provide in-depth, on-site interactive experience in cancer registry operations to strengthen registry staff and registries throughout North America. In this situation, a credentialed practitioner seeks a credentialed mentor for specific guidance and training needs.

Eye on the Future

Keeping these models in mind, envision how hospitals and HIM-related vendors and companies could someday offer HIM graduates paid full-time internships or fellowships to enhance their experience level. A similar opportunity may be in the future for HIM professionals wishing to acquire in-depth, on-site experience related to EHR implementation from another HIM professional.

AHIMA's work force research data validate our current employment patterns and future goals.³ Now our challenge is to find the ways to achieve these goals. Career-entry and career-progression internship and fellowship programs may be one answer to the need for developing experienced practitioners.

Notes

1. "Paid HIM Internship." Carl T. Hayden, VA Medical Center press release. April 2004, Phoenix, AZ.
2. "Mentor Fellowship Program." North American Association of Central Cancer Registries. Available online at www.naaccr.org/index.asp?Col_SectionKey=10&Col_ContentID=145.
3. See www.ahima.org/fore/practice/workforce.cfm for copies of the work force study reports.

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