

# E-environments: Highlighting the Role of HIM

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*by Donald T. Mon, PhD*

Previous “E-HIM Fundamentals” columns have outlined the common threads of the national health information infrastructure (NHII), the electronic health record (EHR), and the personal health record (PHR), which include:

- The NHII will not be a central database of medical records.
- EHRs and PHRs are key components of an information infrastructure.
- The longitudinal health record can be implemented as a set of distributed, federated EHRs.
- The data that are exchanged when patients are referred from one institution to another are a subset of that found in an EHR.
- When longitudinal health records are implemented as a set of distributed EHRs, the glue holding them together is the PHR.

(Note: in recent months, the term NHII has been supplanted by a new moniker, regional health information exchange network. Though the name may have changed, the concept is largely the same.)

The electronic environment of regional health information exchange networks, EHRs, and PHRs will bring to light a host of health information management responsibilities and new roles for which HIM professionals are well positioned.

## Spotlight on the PHR: A New Role for HIM Professionals

The PHR in particular will require consumer education—a role for which no other profession is better suited than HIM. In this new age of PHRs, in which consumers have virtually no experience in managing health records, consumers will need to be educated as to:

- What the PHR is, what information it contains, and why it contains that information
- The measures being taken by healthcare professionals and provider institutions to ensure the privacy of their health information
- How to ensure their own health information privacy
- Their responsibilities for managing their own health information

Physicians and nurses may discuss the contents of the clinical information in their records with patients. However, it is unlikely that they will discuss with consumers the need to manage their health information. IT professionals, who may have a wealth of experience implementing and maintaining PHR products and systems, have even less contact and experience in dealing with consumers regarding their health records.

Educating consumers about their responsibilities in managing their records—a responsibility not to be taken lightly—is clearly in the purview of the HIM professional. Moreover, consumer education can be an exciting new role, one that provides terrific visibility for the HIM professional both within the institution and with the consumer. Not only can consumer education be conducted within the facility at the end of the patient visit or encounter, it can also be provided in the community, through town hall discussions, for example.

## Emphasizing the HIM in E-HIM

The electronic environment will call greater attention to HIM responsibilities. Consider what the world of distributed, federated health records will be like. A clinician in one institution will need to access records from another on a real-time basis. The health record must always be on, like high-speed broadband Internet access. After accessing a patient’s health record, the

clinician must trust that the health information received is accurate, otherwise, the clinician, putting more trust in the information generated by his own institution, may order a duplicate set of tests.

Data management and data quality, therefore, must be performed at the front end. Records that must be provided to clinicians on a real-time basis cannot be cleaned up at the back end (e.g., weeks after a visit or discharge has occurred) because of the risk of sending erroneous or incomplete data.

The electronic environment will provide terrific opportunities for the HIM professional. These opportunities may produce exciting new roles, with greater visibility in the institution and the community. At the very least, the electronic environment will underscore the importance of health information management. HIM professionals who embrace and prepare for these changes will be highly successful in the electronic environment.

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