

EHR and Interoperability: Reaching the Tipping Point

Save to myBoK

by Linda Kloss, RHIA, CAE, executive vice president/CEO

The drive to create an interoperable health information system accelerated during the summer. Four major initiatives came together in the summer heat, and our nation is poised to move from talk to action about health information infrastructure. We have reached the tipping point.

National events have created a momentum for change that will not be derailed:

- The office of the national health information technology coordinator announced a strategic framework on July 21.
- Connecting for Health released a preliminary roadmap for near-term change.
- Interoperability grants were awarded to communities across the country.
- IT standards are moving from abstract to utility.
- Allied health bipartisan legislation is in the House and Senate.

At the same time, EHR implementation has become a priority for many organizations, and e-HIM™ has taken on real meaning for HIM as the rallying cry to move from paper to electronic health information management.

E-HIM—A Growing Body of Knowledge

Deborah Kohn, an e-HIM pioneer, describes the challenges of managing electronic documents and records in “When the Writ Hits the Fan: The Importance of Managing Electronic Health Records as Business Documents.” HIM professionals understand that health records are business records no matter what form—paper, hybrid, or electronic. But IT software doesn’t always support these requirements.

In “Government Issue: CHI Lays the Groundwork for Federal Data Exchange,” (*Journal of AHIMA*, September 2004), Cynthia Wark, Marcia Insley, Laura Tillery, and Nancy Orvis delve into Consolidated Health Informatics (CHI), a federal government project that is helping move the private sector toward standards-based information solutions. All HIM professionals should be familiar with the work of CHI and keep up to date as the standards are adopted for the subject areas outlined in the CHI Standards table at the end of the article.

In addition to electronic records management and standards-based solutions, tenets of HIM include privacy, security, and integrity of information. In “Protecting the Wave of the Future: Establishing Security for the Electronic Health Record,” Jonathan Barmettler and Jeffrey Bauer outline key policy and procedure requirements for EHR privacy and security management. Madhavan Nayer and Sharon Miller do the same as it relates to concepts in information integrity in “Anticipating Error: Identifying Weak Links in the Electronic Healthcare Environment.”

Finally, Carol Quinsey and Jacqueline Raymond research “Career Opportunities in Information Technology.” The HIM work force research shows us that HIM professionals today work in 40 settings in more than 200 types of jobs. A few years ago the implication was that if you worked in IT, then you had left HIM. Nothing could be further from the truth, and the article identifies the range of IT challenges that need HIM skills and competencies.

Getting the Message Out

It is not clear that all HIM professionals understand the urgent need to map a course of change from paper to electronic records for their organizations. To help the field, the FORE Foundation has announced a revised best practices program to support e-HIM.

The summer of 2004 will surely be remembered as the tipping point, when IT modernization in healthcare really took hold. To be sure, huge challenges remain, including funding and financial incentives and a skilled work force to implement systems.

Nonetheless, the public and private sectors are aligned, and on behalf of all HIM professionals, AHIMA is proud to be part of the national change agenda.

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Driving the Power of Knowledge

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