

EHR in Place? Now the Real Work Begins

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By Angela C. Kennedy, EdD, MBA, RHIA

With the deadline for ICD-10-CM/PCS on the horizon and electronic health records now in place in the majority of hospitals, HIM professionals may find themselves asking, “What comes next?” Until recently, the biggest challenges in electronic health information management were first to be able to collect the data, then to sort through the high volume of data coming from a variety of systems.

Tomorrow’s challenge will be to use that information—packaged and delivered to the right person at the right time—to drive decision making and improve the quality of care. Think of this as business intelligence for healthcare, or “health intelligence.”

Successful organizations will build this capability by focusing first on information governance (IG). This includes the accountability framework, infrastructure, and decision rights that ensure information is both trustworthy and actionable. In February, AHIMA held its second Information Governance Month to help create awareness of the need for IG in healthcare and to call for HIM professionals to build their knowledge on this subject. Webinars, social media, and dedicated sessions at this year’s AHIMA Annual Convention and Exhibit will provide HIM professionals with opportunities to learn best practices and assessment strategies.

Informatics Adds Dimension to HIM

Informatics, or the effective analysis and use of information for decision making, will provide another great opportunity for HIM professionals to grow into the future needs of healthcare by expanding on their existing skill sets.

This opportunity includes broadening expertise in standards, analytics, terminologies, classification systems, and mapping principles that can be applied across a variety of settings. It requires us to engage people and parties that we may have previously only worked with in parallel—rather than as collaborators. We have an opportunity to seize the moment to volunteer our knowledge and capabilities, to put them to use in new ways.

Integrating HIM Practices Across the Continuum

In addition to creating health intelligence, the other big change already underway in the US healthcare landscape is a shift from the traditional HIM department to an integration of HIM practices throughout the care continuum.

Just as enterprise information systems are bringing clinical, allied health, and operational data under one umbrella, health information professionals will be asked to use their knowledge of structure and standards for applications outside the walls of their traditional setting. Similar to a business degree, health information management will no longer be defined as a business unit but as a skill set that is spread throughout the enterprise and applied in different ways.

It is up to each of us to bring to life the future of HIM by educating ourselves, our colleagues, and our employers on these emerging practices and to provide feedback on what works effectively. I encourage you to take a , get a new credential, or join a community and help to lead your peers and bring additional value to your organization.

And of course, to Dream Big, Believe, and Lead.

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