

# Earning HIM Cred—The RHIA and RHIT

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*By Mary Butler*

For two AHIMA credential holders—one with a [registered health information administrator](#) (RHIA) and one with a [registered health information technician](#) (RHIT) credential—the extra work required to earn them have paid dividends. Both Karen Linder, BS, RHIT, CCS, CCS-P, and Jennifer Schimpf, MA, RHIA, have been given the opportunity to take on leadership roles in their organizations, as well as a competitive edge in the job market.

The decision to pursue any given health information management (HIM) credential is a personal one and unique as the individual that obtains it. The *Journal* recently talked with Schimpf and Linder to learn more about how their credentials shaped their careers and their influence in the field of HIM.

## Earning the RHIT

Karen Linder, BS, RHIT, CCS, CCS-P, is the coding manager at Rochester Regional Health System, in Rochester, NY, where she works with a staff of 56 direct reports. She earned her RHIT after getting her associate's degree when her first employer encouraged her to sit for the RHIT exam. Even though Linder was doing well in her job, she still wanted to go back to school for a bachelor's degree to improve her qualifications for management roles down the line.

She did complete her bachelor's degree in hopes of being eligible to sit for the RHIA, but because the institution she attended was not an AHIMA-accredited school, she can't sit for the RHIA exam. Currently, Linder is considering going back for her master's degree which would allow her to be eligible for the RHIA credential, which she believes will offer more opportunities in the future.

“There's so many avenues you can go down [in HIM],” Linder says. “I just don't know if this is where I'll be forever. It's a pretty good field to be in at this current time.”

Linder notes a fair amount of prestige accompanies the RHIT, and she and other RHITs in her organization are looked to as the experts in the field, though RHITs tend to work more in coding roles while RHIAs are in more management positions.

Having an RHIT, Linder says, helps provide a broader view of a healthcare organization.

When she's hiring for positions, “We do look for the AHIMA credentials, and the mastery of the skillset that comes with those credentials,” she notes.

Regardless of whether an HIM professional has an RHIA or an RHIT, Linder encourages them to pursue that extra credential. Her organization requires new coding hires to pass the RHIT exam within a year of signing on.

“We let three people go because they didn't pass the test. It really weeds out those that can't take it [coding work], from those who can. I do encourage folks that want to code to go get it. People look differently at those that have it versus those that don't.”

## Earning the RHIA

Jennifer Schimpf, MS, RHIA, senior business analyst at WellMatch (a Healthagen company), came to HIM as a second career and in need of a change from her sales-focused marketing job. Her undergraduate degree was in biology and her marketing career included fields both in and out of healthcare. Schimpf says her passion for healthcare and technology led her to a master's program in HIM, where she was fortunate to land a student position in the HIM department in a large physician's practice.

Since Schimpf was pursuing an RHIA with her master's degree, she believes she was given the opportunity to step into a management role at the facility where she'd been working in a student capacity, even ahead of more tenured employees.

"Having that educational path in front of me made me stand out as a good candidate for that position—I ended up staying on as HIM supervisor," Schimpf says. "I went for the credentials right after graduation, which I think is definitely advice I would give to any other candidate—go for it and try and put in the time to study and to test for it, as soon as you can after grad while the info is still fresh in your mind."

Schimpf recommends sitting for the RHIA exam as soon as possible, while the coursework is still fresh. She estimates that she waited no longer than six months. It can still be challenging, she says. Before the exam, she was working full time, going to school, and studying for the exam. It was comforting, though, to have the support of her coworkers and manager during this time.

"Ask for guidance from your peers and managers. From my experience, everyone was supportive, especially something that will help in your career and contribute to success," Schimpf says.

At WellMatch (part of the insurer Aetna) Schimpf says she works in a nontraditional HIM role. WellMatch is a service that offers a healthcare price transparency tool. There, she has helped build a reporting program that provides WellMatch customers with utilization metrics. More recently she has taken on additional leadership roles in implementing analytics across the organization, and by partnering with data engineering team.

"I definitely think that having the RHIA really kind of sets you apart from other candidates in a leadership position. For people who want to follow a management path, especially in more of a traditional role, having that is really key," Schimpf says. "It shows you have a certain level of experience and certain mastery of skills and that broad range of all the HIM domains."

*Mary Butler is the associate editor at The Journal of AHIMA.*

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