

Education, Collaboration Keys to Director's Success

Save to myBoK

by Anne Zender, vice president of communications

When Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) in Boston has a tough health information-related issue to solve, chances are Deborah Adair, MPH, MS, RHIA, and her team are already working on it.

Director of health information services and privacy officer at MGH (part of the Partners HealthCare system), Adair is currently working to solve a number of problems within her organization, including improving documentation across the continuum. She is also working on a project to identify the responsible physician for any given patient at any given point in time, a “tough nut” of a problem to crack, she says.

Adair also works on data integrity and identity theft issues, educating staff members and looking at technological solutions such as biometrics.

Finding Her Niche

Adair began her career working in HIM; then, after about 13 years, moved to a different role working with case-mix management and utilization management. She went back to school and earned her master's degree with a focus in biostatistics and epidemiology.

“By the time I finished I decided I was ready to advance,” she remembers, but she wasn't sure where she would fit in. “I wasn't planning to go back to a traditional HIM department, but saw an opportunity to make a difference,” she says. She has held her current position for nine years, adding the privacy component when HIPAA implementation began.

Adair also has an interest in education. A former senior instructor at Northeastern University for 20 years, until the school closed its RHIA program, Adair is now part of a Massachusetts task force looking for another home for the program.

She also participates in AHIMA's Education Strategy Committee, “because I have strong feelings about the kind of people we [in HIM] need.” She is helping to develop the new competencies for RHIA, RHIT, and master's programs and curricula.

Partnering with IT

Adair also believes that the profession faces significant challenges, including increasing the number of credentialed practitioners. “I think that HIM education has a great opportunity now. I would like to see us maintain our requirements for credentials,” Adair says. “We are a profession and we do get sought out for our expertise. There's room for HIM and HIT to be at the same table and collaborate.”

Adair gets a lot of opportunities to see this collaboration play out. She works closely with colleagues who are in IT. “They look to HIM on data integrity and EMPI issues, for the policy perspective. It's all about managing the data,” she says.

In fact, Adair has met with her organization's CIO about how their departments can work more closely together. “I thought I was going to get a [to-do] list, but they talked about how helpful we are and the many ways we do work together,” she recalls. “Our IT colleagues look for us to provide them with operational understanding and process flow, policy requirements, compliance, and legal issues,” she says.

One of the outcomes of the conversation was the suggestion for a new HIM column in the IT department's newsletter, she says, to communicate new requirements and regulations. She's also excited to pass along new HIM tools, such as AHIMA's guidance on managing hybrid records, to the rest of her organization.

“AHIMA has a lot of tools that we're lucky to have access to,” she says. “We can share them and that's part of our value.”

Article citation:

Zender, Anne. "Education, Collaboration Keys to Director's Success" *Journal of AHIMA* 79, no.9 (September 2008): 92.

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