Empowering Consumers to Take Charge of Their Healthcare

Save to myBoK

By Cassi Birnbaum, MS, RHIA, CPHQ, FAHIMA

Putting the consumer in the driver's seat represents a paradigm shift for health information management (HIM) professionals in many ways. Traditional release of information functions grow increasingly outdated in the face of work to remove barriers between consumers and their health information, such as providing patient portals and increasing connectivity opportunities afforded by health information exchange and the Blue Button Initiative.

As HIM professionals, our most important role is facilitating the ability of consumers to securely and confidentially access their health information anywhere and anytime—wherever it exists. AHIMA's goal to empower consumers is critical to transforming healthcare—both at the individual patient level and at the collective level for improving population health.

As a board member of San Diego Health Connect, a regional health information exchange organization, I have found that our greatest challenge isn't IT infrastructure, consent, or interoperability—though we tackled those issues early on. It is actually patient matching that continues to challenge our resources. AHIMA is leading patient matching initiatives, pursuing the development of a national patient safety identifier to ensure healthcare providers identify the right patient at the point of care and thus prevent issues related to patient safety, compliance, or test and treatment duplication.

One of the many highlights of my year as AHIMA's president was taking our consumer engagement vision global to energize HIM and informatics professionals to take a leadership role in enabling consumers to become active participants in managing their health. We can now serve consumers directly as patient navigators, as portal administrators, and in senior positions as chief patient experience officers. Instead of using privacy laws as a barrier to access, we can instead make a difference one patient at a time in providing them with secure and compliant patient portal access options, and use open doctors' notes to increase trust and transparency in the care process.

At last year's AHIMA Convention and Exhibit, we invited Eric Topol, MD, cardiologist and digital pioneer from Scripps Health, to share his innovative approaches to putting technology in the hands of his patients to improve their care. His first book, *The Creative Destruction of Medicine*, raised a lot of eyebrows in the medical world and challenged conventional medical thinking. In his second book, *The Patient Will See You Now*, he said that patients are ready to perform at least one more task: revolutionize healthcare. The insight at the heart of Dr. Topol's message is that patients know themselves better than anyone else and are deeply invested in their own health. They have an incentive to monitor their health more comprehensively than a physician ever could and pursue treatment with a unique intensity of purpose.

Together, we can realize our vision for engaged consumers and public good, breaking down the barriers that our patients currently face—such as the inefficiencies of re-collecting the same information with each visit, recurring documentation errors in the medical record, unplanned readmissions due to communication and information barriers, and medication reconciliation challenges that stem from lack of system interoperability, even within the same healthcare system. Let's not waste another minute as we realize our vision to enhance and improve the consumer experience through access to trusted information to enable improved clinical outcomes.

Cassi Birnbaum (cassi.birnbaum@ahima.org) is senior vice president of HIM and consulting at Peak Health Solutions.

Article citation:
Birnbaum, Cassi L. "Empowering Consumers to Take Charge of Their Healthcare" *Journal of AHIMA* 86, no.9 (September 2015): 8.

Driving the Power of Knowledge