

Enabling the Health IT Transformation: Education and Diversity Key to Healthcare's IT Evolution

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The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act notes the need for trained professionals across the healthcare continuum who are savvy with technology. Health IT is playing and will continue to play a prominent role in healthcare's evolution—and for good reason.

In order for the “meaningful use” of health IT to be truly meaningful, healthcare professionals must embrace technology and understand that it is there for a reason. But change management is not that easy.

In order for healthcare professionals to embrace EHRs, they need to perceive them as useful and of value. HIM professionals can help facilitate this through active communication and support during the transition. However, education and diversity are also paramount to accomplishing this.

Education and Diversity

The healthcare and HIM workforce need education on EHRs and health IT. AHIMA recently crafted a letter to state legislators that urges the creation of more baccalaureate-level programs in state universities. This letter is available on AHIMA's ARRA Web page at www.ahima.org/arra [web page no longer available].

Members can download this letter and share it with their state leaders. A discussion with a legislator can go a long way to achieving this aim.

Diversity comes in several flavors. HIM professionals continue to permeate a variety of healthcare settings from physician offices to long-term care to third-party payers and research organizations. It is particularly important to ensure that payers are managing information properly, so continued diversification of HIM roles is paramount for quality healthcare.

A diverse workforce can also be defined by culture. There are varied thought styles and behaviors that support quality. For example, communicating with patients and consumers is more effective when there is familiarity through like cultures. It builds trust.

As human beings we tend to make assumptions based on outward appearances, which could be based on age, race, or other visible differences, and this can erode trust. For example, I recently heard a story about a philharmonic orchestra auditioning a musician who knew members of the panel.

The orchestra directors held auditions behind a curtain so that the panel could not see the musicians. The result helped the philharmonic become more diverse, since musicians were selected for their expertise alone and not on assumptions based on visible differences.

HIM's Future

HIM's younger professionals bring more IT experience to the workplace. In an article in the July 9 issue of *Health Leaders* magazine, Darrell Kirch, MD, president and CEO of the American Association of Medical Colleges, says in reference to the younger generation of physicians, “Their ability to seamlessly interface with technology will make them very strong physicians in the face of all the data they have to handle in clinical situations.” This is true for HIM professionals as well.

With the increasing complexity of clinical information and classification systems, processing information from paper becomes more and more difficult and unreliable. Let's embrace our diversity and encourage it. We can certainly learn from each other

and become a stronger profession.

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