

Ensuring HIM's Future: Technology Skills Required in New Era of e-HIM

Save to myBoK

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Our workforce, like our population, is aging. Because of the dip in births following the Baby Boomer generation, we are facing shortages. The demographics of our workforce and the impact of the economy have created a unique environment wherein our coworkers may span from the Silent Generation to the Echo Boomers.

With the growing pace of EHR implementations, our diverse workforce will need a diverse set of skills to succeed in a virtual work environment.

Technology Skills Required

As we look to the future HIM staff will need technology skills. While some may need advanced degrees to perform certain roles, we all will need to be proficient and comfortable with technology.

Release of information staff will need to know where to find documentation in the myriad reporting systems that any healthcare entity may have. The challenge will be ensuring that the appropriate reporting system is selected and the documentation selected represents the "final" authenticated version.

Analysts may need to assess documentation in a variety of systems to ensure that each of the required components has been created and authenticated. In an EHR environment, it is possible for a segment of documentation to be missed.

Hence, HIM must define the source systems, the characteristics of digital documentation, and the requirements for staff.

Unfortunately, EHR vendors and healthcare facility management, including IT, err by not including HIM professionals in the design of EHR systems, defining workflows, and implementing EHR systems. Hence, HIM must address the documentation voids after discharge and call upon clinicians to recall information about the patient to ensure that the encounter meets the requirements for the organization's legal health record.

Coding staff will no longer have the advantage of handwriting changes to tell the patient's story. Coding professionals have learned over time where to find the elements required to completely and accurately code an encounter. Documentation may be segregated by clinical specialty, clinician, or clinical role. Instead of retaining the tabular structure for segregating clinical information, the information may be longitudinal.

A new fully electronic and different record structure may result in loss of productivity as coding professionals search for information or, sadly, a lack of information due to new templates or formats.

HIM professionals should be involved in developing documentation templates to ensure the documentation required to code and sustain the organization's revenue stream is captured in the EHR.

Ensuring Your Future

There are endless examples of how the EHR will impact HIM staffs. But changing from paper to an electronic environment requires more than entering a user name and password.

Understanding the entire system and being able to efficiently navigate through the many system applications to find what is needed and validate the information requires a whole new skill set. In addition, for HIM directors, understanding both clinical

and HIM staff workflows requires an even broader understanding of behaviors and technology skills, including template development, database development, and data mining.

This Labor Day, make a resolution to seek ways to enhance your workforce's skills as well as your own to ensure your team has a future in this soon-to-be virtual environment.

Article citation:

Dunn, Rose T. "Ensuring HIM's Future: Technology Skills Required in New Era of e-HIM" *Journal of AHIMA* 82, no.9 (September 2011): 21.

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