

Establishing a Fellowship Program

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Background Information

The concept of advanced standing—recognition such as fellowship for individuals with substantial professional achievements—has been discussed by AHIMA volunteer leaders for many years. Delegates at the 1997 House of Delegates expressed interest in developing an advanced standing program and requested further information regarding implementation. The AHIMA 1997 Leadership Task Force also recommended the establishment of an advanced recognition program to further the professionalization of the discipline. As a result, the development of a fellowship program became an action item in the Vision 2006 initiative. In 1998 the AHIMA Board of Directors charged the Joint Committee on Education (JCE) to investigate the feasibility of such a program and to develop a fellowship program model.

During its investigation, the JCE identified that many other allied health professions have fellowship programs that are achievement-based and recognize service and continuing education accumulated over a lifetime. The fellowship programs that were studied included those of the Healthcare Financial Management Association, American Physical Therapy Association, American Occupational Therapy Association, American College of Healthcare Executives, American Dietetic Association, and American Medical Informatics Association. The overriding finding by this study was that there is no single comprehensive view or definition of fellowship status across professions. Organizations varyingly treat fellowship as a credential, a membership status, an award, or a recognition.

From its research of these other allied health professions' fellowship programs and other information, the JCE consensus was that AHIMA's fellowship designation should be a combination of recognition of professional achievement and advancement of the profession; represent the accumulation of lifelong work; and have two levels, one of candidacy and one of fellowship.

The JCE proposed a fellowship program, the purpose of which would be to:

- recognize significant and sustained contribution to advance the HIM discipline through demonstrated meritorious service, excellence in professional practice, excellence in HIM education, innovation in practice or education, and knowledge sharing
- provide an incentive for members to contribute to the advancement of the profession
- bring together senior HIM professionals as an organizational resource for continued promotion and development of the profession through a variety of activities

The rationale for development is to provide a mechanism to revitalize the profession and association internally and advance a progressive professional image to the external environment.

The fellowship program is open to any individual who is an active, associate, honorary, or senior member of AHIMA and who meets specified eligibility requirements of, at minimum:

- 10 years full-time professional experience in HIM or related field
- 10 years continuous AHIMA membership at time of application
- master's degree

A candidacy status is also available to serve as a preparatory period for those interested in achieving fellow status. Criteria for candidacy includes, at minimum: five years full-time professional experience in HIM or related field; master's degree; five years of continuous AHIMA membership at time of application.

Those wishing to apply for fellowship or candidacy will be required to submit an application and application fee accompanied by a portfolio that demonstrates valuing of professional growth and use of innovative and creative solutions in at least one of the following areas:

- service to the profession
- excellence in professional practice
- excellence in education
- advancement of the profession through innovation or knowledge sharing

Once the status of fellowship is conferred, it is a lifetime designation subject to continuing AHIMA membership and conformance to the AHIMA Code of Ethics. Each fellow will be recognized as "FAHIMA." There will be no annual dues attached to this designation.

In December 1998, the AHIMA Board unanimously supported the proposed fellowship program as developed by the JCE. Subsequently information about the proposed program was disseminated at spring and summer 1999 team talks and through various AHIMA communication vehicles.

Resolution

Topic: Establish a Fellowship Program

Intent: Establish a program of earned recognition for AHIMA members who have made significant and sustained contributions to advance the profession

Addressed To: 1999 House of Delegates

Originators: AHIMA Board of Directors Council on Certification

Approved by: 1999 House of Delegates

Date: October 3, 1999

Whereas, a mechanism to recognize advanced practice and significant contribution to the profession by AHIMA members has been discussed for several years;

Whereas, the 1997 Leadership Task Force recommended creation of a mechanism to recognize advanced standing;

Whereas, the 1997 House of Delegates caucus groups expressed interest in developing an advanced standing program;

Whereas, other allied health professional associations have mechanisms to recognize members whose work has resulted in lasting and significant advances in the science, education, practice or service to the profession;

Whereas, establishment of a fellowship program will help to professionalize the health information management discipline;

Whereas, establishment of a fellowship program will provide individual members an incentive to contribute to the profession;

Whereas, the fellowship program will advance a progressive image of HIM to the external environment;

Whereas, the fellowship program is a mechanism to bring together senior HIM professionals as an organizational resource for continued promotion and development of the profession;

Resolved, that AHIMA implement a fellowship program that is open to any individual who is an active, associate, honorary, or senior member of AHIMA and that is designed to provide a mechanism to recognize advanced practice and significant contribution to the health information management profession.

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