

Evolving Practice of Health Informatics

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WHEN I DECIDED to pursue my graduate education in health information management (HIM) and informatics seven years ago, adoption rates for advanced electronic health record (EHR) systems were evolving, data was siloed, and interoperability was far from reality. Organizations were up to their elbows in a hybrid record state, working on document imaging, defining the legal record, and data integrity issues stemming from a lack of standardized definitions, discrete fields, copy-and-paste mania, and data integration efforts.

The conceptual definition of health informatics is the utilization of information technologies and information management tactics to enhance process efficiency and reduce costs, according to the Oregon Institute of Technology. The practical application of health informatics establishes data capture, analysis, and reporting that is stored in HIM systems to create knowledge. Health informatics is concerned with the manipulation and interpretation of enterprise-wide data to create a story of outcomes, process, and cost.

AHIMA's health informatics strategic initiative provides the healthcare industry with a blueprint to seamlessly convert data into health intelligence to propel the improvement of population health. It is our goal to provide our members with the training, tools, standards, and credentialing to support the analytical and reporting requirements of accountable care organizations and value-based purchasing so we embrace—and not get run over by—Big Data. Approximately 80 percent of data is unstructured, according to a white paper from DATAMARK, and resides in multiple places in EHRs and other clinical systems. Additional challenges include data interoperability and securing data across EHR systems. AHIMA's strategic focus for this year is to ensure that we support the current state of coding and clinical documentation improvement (CDI) as we prepare for the transition to ICD-10-CM/PCS.

Recognizing that the advancement of technology contributes to the evolving role of the coder in healthcare today and tomorrow, AHIMA's education and certification track will facilitate retraining closely tied to the future roles of supporting data validation, CDI, informatics, and analytics. The House of Delegates, AHIMA Board of Directors, and Council for Excellence in Education will be working collaboratively to develop a vision for the future state of the role of coders and a pathway to achieving success.

Some additional critical initiatives will focus on building AHIMA's HIM Body of Knowledge, encouraging industry adoption of "health intelligence" drawn from data analytics, increasing the use of clinical data for secondary purposes (including public health), and promoting the value of the CHDA credential and education/experience in the informatics field.

HIM professionals contribute to sound healthcare decision-making through analytics, informatics, and decision support. Healthcare organizations will depend on HIM professionals as leaders across all healthcare sectors, with expertise in predictive modeling of clinical information, trend analysis, and revenue cycle management.

Health informatics is about making a difference one patient at a time. The utilization of health informatics will facilitate the improvement of patient outcomes, a reduction in costs, and more meaningful strategies to improve the health of a community. Now is the time to realize this vision by embracing health informatics.

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Article citation:

Birnbaum, Cassi L. "Evolving Practice of Health Informatics" *Journal of AHIMA* 86, no.5 (May 2015): 8.

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