

Expanding Universe: a New Manager Educates Herself -- and Upper Management, Too

Save to myBoK

by Kevin Heubusch, managing editor

In HIM, the universe is expanding. The key to expanding with it, says Mechel McKinney, BSB/A, RHIA, is education: educating yourself to do bigger and better HIM work and educating upper management about HIM's important role throughout an organization.

McKinney began her HIM career in the brand-new HIT program at the University of New Mexico-Gallup. Hospital volunteer work led her to a job offer before she even graduated. She started in inpatient coding at Rehoboth McKinley Christian Hospital, and by the end of three years, she was "coding anything and everything" that came across her desk.

When McKinney left Gallup for Albuquerque, she took her coding experience with her and brought along something new, RHIT credentials. What she lacked when she arrived was a job.

Management Fast Track

McKinney soon had an interview for a coding position with St. Joseph Healthcare System. By the time of the interview, however, the position had been downgraded to part-time. But McKinney's experience and credentials impressed the healthcare system, and they offered her a different job, the recently vacated position of health information coordinator.

Management was a new environment, and McKinney set about learning the big picture of HIM operations. She learned quickly and became operations manager for the medical center, one of five facilities in the system.

It wasn't long before she was promoted to HIM manager. Here McKinney learned about a whole new animal—the revenue cycle. "All the things you don't see as an employee, I had to see now as a manager," she says. She delved into process and productivity and learned how these affect the revenue cycle. Her goal was to help streamline the cycle by keeping HIM functions moving smoothly.

Within a year, she was promoted again, this time to operations director, overseeing four of St. Joseph's facilities. Clearly McKinney was proving adept at managing, and no one saw that more clearly than St. Joseph's HIM director, Sandra Nunn, MA, RHIA. McKinney says Nunn recognized potential in her, placed faith in her, and was a great mentor. During this period she returned to school full time and obtained a bachelor's in business administration. This enabled her to sit for (and pass) the RHIA exam.

Spotlight on HIM

With new hospital management came a strong emphasis on fiscal performance. One of the biggest challenges she and her management team faced, McKinney says, was illustrating HIM's influence on the bottom line to upper management.

McKinney paid the heavy price of "many, many meetings with decision makers," but when she emerged, the administration had a new understanding of the HIM role. Her departments took pride in that role and in "seeing their shelves clean and knowing that was a contribution recognized by upper management."

That same groundwork also smoothed the way for an in-house credentialing prep course. With new appreciation for the importance of quality coding, upper management supported the program to prep coders to obtain credentials.

Back to School

Education has been such a constant theme in McKinney's career that maybe it's inevitable she went into teaching. In fall 2003 she became program director of the HIT program at Albuquerque Technical Vocational Institute.

"There is an abundance of opportunities in this field," she advises students. "Learn as much as you can in all areas of health information."

Article citation:

Heubusch, Kevin. "The Expanding Universe: a New Manager Educates Herself--and Upper Management, Too." *Journal of AHIMA* 75, no.3 (March 2004): 88.

Driving the Power of Knowledge

Copyright 2022 by The American Health Information Management Association. All Rights Reserved.