

Facing New Challenges Every Day

Save to myBoK

by Jewelle Hicks, newsletter editor

"As HIM professionals, we always have the opportunity to tell others about our careers. You never realize the impact these 'marketing moments' can have on others."

--Laurie Bach, RHIA, SNF administrator/manager of HIS,
McClellan Health System, Cambridge, NY

What is the key to managing a successful HIM staff? If you're Laurie Bach, RHIA, the secret is the ability to multitask. As both a skilled nursing facility (SNF) administrator and manager of health information services at McClellan Health Systems in Cambridge, NY, Bach is used to having more than one role to play.

One Person, Multiple Responsibilities

Besides acting as the SNF administrator for the 40-bed facility and serving as manager of health information services (HIS), Bach also acts as corporate compliance officer. In addition, the SNF nursing, social services, quality/risk management, credentialing, and information services departments all report to Bach.

The decision to combine the roles of SNF administrator and HIS manager was made by the former CEO of Bach's facility. "He felt that HIM professionals were the best people equipped to do the job," Bach says. "He was impressed with my ability to interpret complex regulations and make them understandable. And I've always worked closely with information systems. Here it felt right to combine them both."

Bach admits her primary challenge is juggling the multiple projects that come across her desk as a result of her many responsibilities. "On any given day I have to call physicians to complete their records, work with the operating room manager on coding new procedures, and answer compliance questions," Bach says. "It's a complex healthcare world and we need to harness and understand it."

The Secret to Her Success

Bach's HIM career began in coding, which she feels was beneficial in the long run. "I feel strongly that having solid coding skills opens doors for advancement because the monetary aspects of HIM are stressed," she says. "It helps to have a strong knowledge base of reimbursement systems especially because they are complex and ever changing." After obtaining her master's degree, Bach set her sights on becoming an administrator. When she learned that McClellan was interested in hiring an administrator as well as an HIS manager, she jumped at the chance to serve in the dual role.

So how does Bach stay on top of all of these tasks and responsibilities? The key for her is staying informed by networking. "I read the *Journal* and attend state and local HIM-sponsored conferences," she says. "It's important to network to help you solve problems. There is a good chance someone else has seen the same problem. I also think it is a must for HIM professionals to be involved in their local and state associations."

What's a Manager to Do?

As any manager will tell you, a major hurdle is keeping staff motivated and enthusiastic. Bach handles this challenge by having an open communication policy with her staff members and encouraging a light atmosphere. "The staff here is amazing; they all really get along well and care about each other. I think not only hiring qualified employees is important, but considering people who will mesh with your current staff."

While staffing can be a difficult task across areas, Bach admits recruitment and retention can be especially difficult in a rural environment. "We've been able to meet this challenge by offering employees an environment where you can see the difference you make every day," she says. "We accomplish this by treating employees as part of the community team, offering flexible hours, and mentoring people coming into the field."

Bach is optimistic about the future of HIM professionals and the role they play in healthcare. She notes that despite the changing tides in the industry, HIM professionals are always there to lead the way. With dedicated professionals like Bach on the case, the future looks bright indeed.

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