

Feet Firmly in the 21st Century: Reviewing A Decade of Expanding Vision, Influence, and Growth

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By Linda L. Kloss, RHIA, FAHIMA

On one of the first days of my tenure on staff at AHIMA, I read the earliest association journals, then the *Journal of the Association of Record Librarians* of North America. These pre-1930 publications discussed practice issues in maintaining accurate and complete clinical documentation and useful data abstracting and statistics. They discussed professional education and advancement and how to market the field. The association founders' main goals were to elevate standards for clinical records, advance the training of practitioners, and encourage professional networking and mentoring.

AHIMA's history since that time is marked by a continuous series of important milestones. The first textbook of the field was published in 1934. The first baccalaureate training program was begun that same year. The first registration examination was administered in 1936. Pretty amazing when you consider that all this work was done by volunteers numbering about 250 who had to correspond by snail mail and travel to meetings by train.

Eight decades later, AHIMA exists to serve these same fundamental purposes, and I hope and expect this will be so 80 years into the future.

In 2003, AHIMA's 75th anniversary year, the *Journal* published a remarkable series of articles laying out AHIMA's accomplishments across each decade of the twentieth century. Amazingly, the first decade of the twenty-first century is now history, and what a decade it's been!

It was a decade of expanding vision, influence, and growth and also a time characterized by the anxiety that comes in periods of intense and dramatic change. As we begin the second decade of the twenty-first century, let's reflect together on some of the recent achievements and what's in store for the health information field and the association.

Health Consumer Education

AHIMA's view of information management extended to issues of consumer-controlled information and individually identifiable health information on the Internet. At the beginning of the decade, a task force of HIM professionals developed 39 e-health tenets. As a follow-on, AHIMA launched the consumer-facing Web site www.MyPHR.com and created a consumer education and media campaign to educate consumers. AHIMA led development of the HL7 standard for personal health records, and as the decade closed, AHIMA announced a Health Information Bill of Rights as an expression of rights for health consumers and a set of patient-centered principles for the profession.

What's ahead: Serving patients through managing access, control, and exchange of their health information will become a central HIM function in the twenty-first century.

Workforce Excellence

The decade closed with enrollments in HIM programs and interest in HIM careers at an all-time high. AHIMA's Vision 2016, a road map for education excellence, is in place, and the new CAHIIM and CCHIIM accrediting and certification bodies are ensuring world-class academic accreditation and competency assessment programming. These achievements reflect decades of focus on curriculum relevance, teaching excellence, paths for professional advancement, and image marketing.

What's ahead: Specialty certification, graduate, and postgraduate education will become fundamental building blocks for practice excellence and professional advancement in the future.

Advancing Professional Practice

A central focus of the past decade has been staying ahead of and helping shape advances in technology, practice, and ever-changing standards and regulations. Today AHIMA offers a remarkable range of resources: practice briefs, white papers, reference materials, textbooks, continuing education resources, and specialty advancement opportunities that cover the scope of practice. More are added all the time.

The AHIMA Foundation has accelerated field-based research to support evidence-based practice. The *Journal of AHIMA*, the e-journal *Perspectives in HIM*, the AHIMA Web site, and the online Body of Knowledge are AHIMA's crown jewels, and many improvements are in the works.

What's ahead: Technological advances are increasing the demand for highly competent knowledge workers who can adopt and adapt best practices and work collaboratively.

Shaping Policy

For most of the decade, AHIMA focused its public advocacy on four key issues: health IT adoption, workforce development, privacy and security improvements, and advancing the quality and consistency of health data.

AHIMA led the industry in preparing for HIPAA, advocating for ICD-10, developing IT standards and product certification, shaping policy on data use and stewardship, and gaining recognition of the need for public investment in developing the health information workforce.

This has required strong industry collaboration and organizational agility, and at the close of this decade, AHIMA is poised to assist the industry deliver value from the federal health IT investments and use digital data to improve healthcare.

What's ahead: The current focus on acquisition and implementation of technology will be eclipsed by a focus on health data and information use and management. The information management field must be ready to lead.

Expanding Scope of Practice

Research confirms that membership in a professional association offers tangible career benefits. In 2003 AHIMA-sponsored workforce research confirmed more than 100 HIM roles and settings, and new roles continue to emerge as practice evolves.

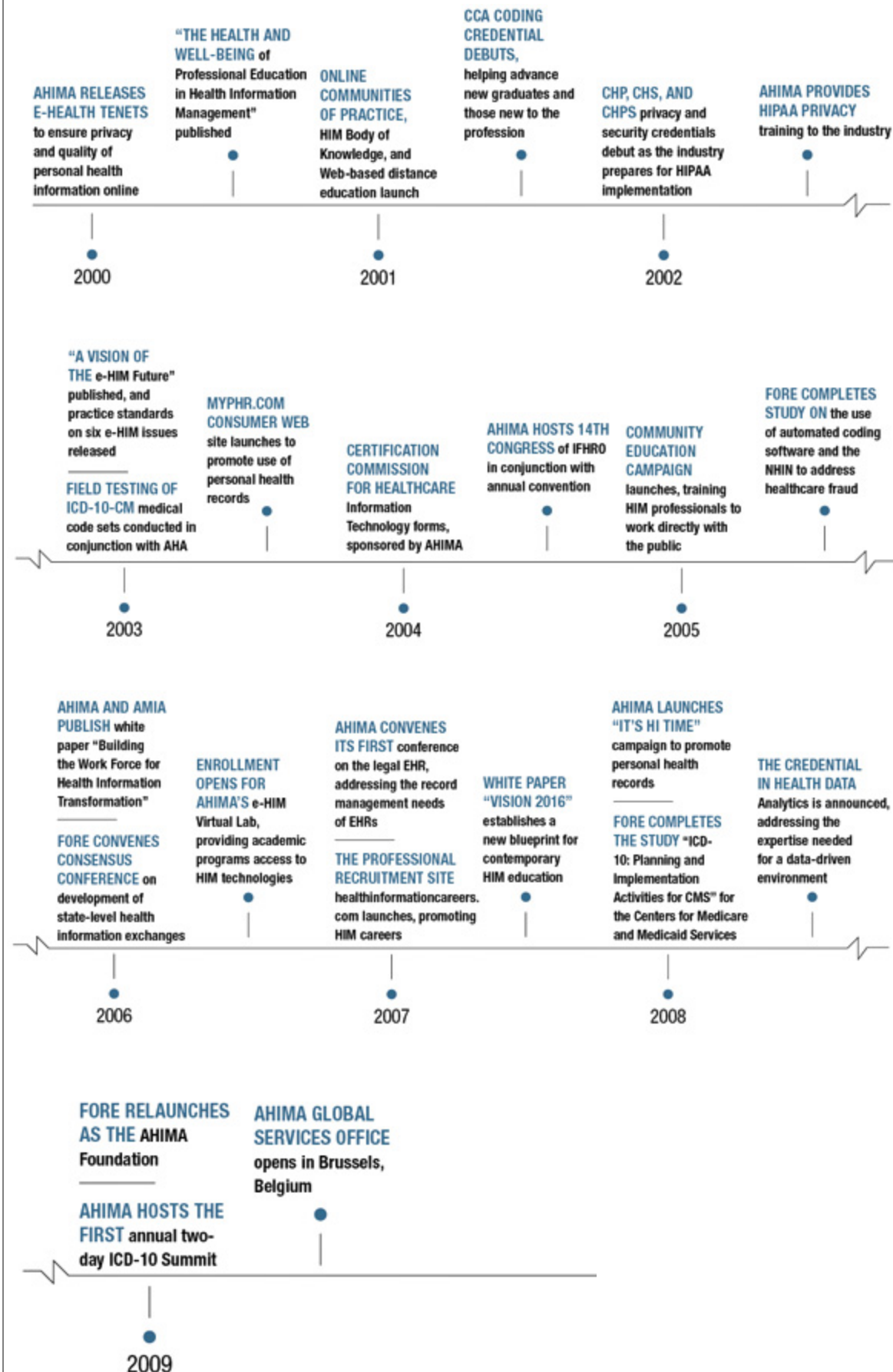
Delivering benefits to more than 53,000 members in 2009-up 28 percent from 2000-in a more diverse scope of practice has required the association make continuous investment and innovation. AHIMA has made bold investments to innovate its services to members. From the association industry's first community of practice and Web library resources to establishing the Research and Policy Institute and a global services office, AHIMA is poised to continue as a leading professional association.

What's ahead: The challenge for the association in the age of social media is to deliver services closely tailored to the needs and interests of each member.

Professional associations are remarkable organizations. They exist to advance knowledge and competence and to serve a public good. Elevating the standards for clinical records and ensuring the availability of accurate and timely information are certainly societal goods.

The public good requires a competent health information workforce capable of twenty-first century information management. This must be the glue that binds AHIMA's members and supporters in the important work ahead-just as it was at the association's inception in 1928.

I have been very proud to be a steward for this organization over the past 15 years, and as a new decade unfolds, I am proud to hand over the stewardship reins to my successor, Alan Dowling, PhD. He and the talented and committed staff of AHIMA have our full support as they tackle the challenges ahead.



Linda L. Kloss is AHIMA's chief executive officer. She steps down in March after 15 years of service.

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