From PHRs to Portals and Beyond: Patient-centric Healthcare Movement Changing HIM

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In our profession, it all comes down to trust. Patients place their trust in us as HIM professionals to ensure that their information is safe, secure, and accurate, and that it will be accessible in the right place at the right time.

It's often an unspoken pact, something many patients do without thinking. They simply assume that their record is in good hands.

HIM professionals have lived up to this responsibility for many years. At times, we have even thought of ourselves as gatekeepers, providing access to some while keeping others out. Now the rules are changing.

Partnering with Patients

"Patient engagement" is a term we're hearing more and more. This is partly due to its incorporation into meaningful use requirements, but it's also the result of technology that makes it possible for patients to be more engaged in their own healthcare. Providers are offering portals that may include PHRs, and patients and their families are becoming more savvy. In fact, they increasingly want more access to their health information. We have an opportunity for HIM professionals to be their advocates.

It's our job to help patients and their families obtain and understand the information they need. We also must act as advocates for patients with our colleagues and other healthcare stakeholders. And we must put ourselves in the patients' shoes as they try to navigate a new and sometimes confusing world of choices for managing their information.

Finally, HIM needs to be responsive to patients who want to find information, and be ready to receive information or corrections from patients as well. This creates complexities, but it could also create benefits. For example, research by NORC at the University of Chicago indicates that patient-generated information can enhance the accuracy and completeness of the medical record.[1] Findings like this reinforce my belief that this new era of patient engagement can lead to a strong partnership between HIM and patients.

In this month's issue, Chris Dimick looks at patient-centric measures we're likely to see in stage 2 meaningful use measures in "Treating Healthcare with Health 'I'T." Lisa Eramo talks to HIM professionals who have implemented patient portals in "Patient Portals: Express Lane on the Health Information Highway." And "Consumer Preparedness in the Face of Disaster" by Julie Wolter, Marsha Dolan, and Julie Dooling explores how we as HIM professionals must plan for anticipated threats and unexpected loss of health information in our work and communities.

One Last Thing

The US Department of Labor (DOL) has invited the public to participate in a pilot project to identify the key credentials that employers look for when making hiring decisions. This summer we've asked AHIMA members to go to the DOL's online Credentials Forum (http://credentials.careeronestop.org) to vote to make AHIMA certifications the credentials of choice. If you've already voted, thank you! The project will be evaluated in September and there may be additional opportunities to participate. AHIMA will keep you updated on the next steps.

Note

1. Dullabh, Prashila. “Policy Issues Related to Patient Reported Data.” Written testimony to the Office of the National Coordinator’s HIT Policy and Standards Committees, June 8, 2012. Available at http://healthit.hhs.gov.

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