

# HIM Issues Front and Center

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by Dan Rode, MBA, FHFMA

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## *Summer of 2006 Marks Great Strides as AHIMA's Key Advocacy Issues Connect with National Initiatives*

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There has been much progress on HIM issues this summer. This article details the latest on health IT legislation and other initiatives, as well as what to look forward to in the coming months and year.

### **ICD-9-CM Replacement Advocacy**

In July the House of Representatives passed HR 4157, the Better Health Information System Act, by a large margin. Since separate health IT bills have passed the House and Senate, a conference committee with representatives from each body is required to iron out the differences in the legislation.

HR 4157 contains language that would implement ICD-10-CM and ICD-10-PCS in the US beginning October 2010. (Provider and payer health technology professionals found that 2010 would be a reasonable deadline to achieve the system changes needed to support the modern classification systems.) Although the Senate legislation (S 1418) does not include language for an ICD-10 upgrade, Senate staff and some senators have indicated a willingness to add it.

There are additional differences between the House and Senate bills related to funding and other issues, and these may prove contentious as the conference committee discusses a compromise. However, Congress has indicated a serious desire to pass a health IT bill before it adjourns for the elections.

### **Work Force**

In 2002 AHIMA studied the HIM profession's needs and released its first work force reports in 2003. In November 2005 AHIMA and the American Medical Informatics Association (AMIA) hosted a summit in Washington, DC, to address work force challenges related to EHRs and a nationwide health information network. The summit included broad representation of industry stakeholders from academia, professional associations, provider organizations, business, and government. From this summit the report "Building the Work Force for Health Information Transformation" was released (available in the FORE Library: HIM Body of Knowledge at [www.ahima.org](http://www.ahima.org)).

The group suggested AHIMA and AMIA establish a task force to define basic competencies for those who use EHRs in their daily work. They also recommended that the two associations jointly define a multi-year work force research agenda and seek funding from federal sources and private foundations. In August AHIMA and AMIA formed such a work group, which plans to release a white paper in December.

The summit report also called for the two associations to "secure a legislative solution to address work force development and retraining shortfalls." Such an initiative has taken off due to input by members of both associations. Congressman David Wu (D-OR) has introduced the 10,000 Trained by 2010 Act (HR 5605), borrowing from the title of an AMIA informatics training campaign. Representative Wu was quickly joined on this bill's sponsorship by senior Republican Ralph Hall (R-TX).

Wu and Hall hope to speed passage of their proposal, and work on a companion bill has begun in the Senate. The legislation would authorize the National Science Foundation to award grants to higher education institutions to develop and offer education and training programs that:

- Establish or improve undergraduate and master's degree programs
- Expand the activities of the advanced technology education programs (aimed at two-year institutions)

- Establish a multidisciplinary center for health and medical informatics research centers
- Promote research in the area of health information

HR 5605's goal is to combat the expected HIM and informatics work force shortage over the next decade. Congress has already introduced the Allied Health Professions Reinvestment Act (HR 215) and the Allied Health Reinvestment Act (S 473), which aim to improve allied health education programs and student recruitment under existing Public Health Title VII. It is unclear if Title VII will receive any funding for allied health, as funding has declined significantly in the last 15 years. There were no funds allocated for allied health in the Title VII budget sent to Congress in the spring.

## Quality Monitoring

While the issue of quality monitoring has received attention in the last few years, it took on new momentum when Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Mike Leavitt announced that he planned to make uniform and consistent quality monitoring his main focus this fall. Leavitt's announcement, during a meeting of the American Health Information Community (AHIC), followed a presentation on the subject by Carolyn Clancy, MD, director of the Agency for Healthcare Quality and Research (AHRQ). AHIC established a work group on quality monitoring as a result of Clancy's presentation. Leavitt's announcement served as a precursor to an executive order addressing quality monitoring signed by President Bush on August 22.

Leavitt has begun meeting with the nation's top 100 employers to encourage them to join him and his agencies (especially the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services) in developing a consensus on uniform quality measurements. He also announced a plan to bring all stakeholders together on this issue, including representatives from the six quality projects under way with AHRQ sponsorship.

The group will develop quality monitoring standards that will be passed on to the Health Information Technology Standards Panel for harmonization with other healthcare standards. They would then go on to the Certification Commission for Healthcare Information Technology for inclusion in future certification criteria. AHIMA is and will continue to be involved in the components of this discussion and the processes that will be developed under Leavitt's leadership.

AHIMA continues its work to ensure the same consistency and uniformity, as well as to ensure that the architecture surrounding the standard EHR is capable of reporting such measures without hampering clinical care, the primary role of an EHR. AHIMA staff are involved in defining the discrepancies in current measurements and determining how the EHR will function for such secondary purposes.

Moving forward, AHIMA has joined with AHRQ and the Medical Group Management Association to hold an invitational quality measurement summit next month. The summit will address the discrepancies in today's ambulatory quality measurement environment and determine what barriers must be overcome to achieve consistency and uniformity.

## Confidentiality and Security

Earlier this year AHIC also established a fifth work group on confidentiality and security. This group will have representation from the other work groups under AHIC, and AHIMA president Jill Callahan Dennis, JD, RHIA, has been asked to represent the HIM profession. Its timetable is unknown presently, but we will report more on this group as its work develops.

AHIMA and AMIA also issued a joint statement on health information confidentiality this summer. The statement notes principles that should be followed by any organization that accesses or stores personal health information, and it identifies principles that should apply when health information is transferred from one entity to another.

In addition to the statement on confidentiality, the two associations issued a joint statement on the value of personal health records (PHRs). This document, intended principally for consumers, establishes seven basic principles that every PHR should follow and provides answers to basic questions. AHIMA's PHR Practice Council is also providing additional guidance to consumers on PHRs via [www.MyPHR.com](http://www.MyPHR.com).

AHIMA's key advocacy issues are connecting strongly with national efforts to establish consistency and integrity of healthcare data, develop the EHR, and create a nationwide health information network that can exchange information with the

confidentiality and security needed to ensure consumer trust. Much activity is going on locally and in our nation's capital, and we will keep you informed, so you too can play your part in achieving these goals.

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