

HIM Practice Transformation

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The transition from paper-based health records to electronic health records (EHRs) is ushering in a new virtual HIM department. Every healthcare organization will need to study and address the effect of the EHR and its management on their organizations and the HIM department. This practice brief outlines how this shift will change HIM and how organizations can prepare for this transformation.

The EHR's Impact

The EHR and its management require HIM professionals and their executive leaders to carefully develop a road map leading from a paper-based to a virtual HIM practice. Every aspect of HIM fundamentals will require a new way of thinking. Work process improvements, implementation techniques, and new information management practices will be essential to HIM practice transformation in all types of care settings. Conscious change management and careful expectation management are critical to the successful creation of the virtual HIM department.

Defining the Virtual HIM Department

The virtual HIM department will be a department without walls. It will have a digital portal (the HIM portal) that allows access to individual, longitudinal digital health records by consumers, care providers, HIM professionals, and others as appropriate. Consumers will access their medical information online for their personal health records. They will schedule appointments and pay bills based on access to their EHR. Consumers will access the HIM portal to authorize disclosure of their personal health information to employers and schools.

Kiosks may be strategically located within facilities to provide access to the HIM portal for consumer transactions. Consumers may also access the portal via the healthcare organization's secured Internet access. HIM staff will remotely access the portal to perform essential functions.

Every HIM function performed to support the paper health record today will be re-engineered—and some eliminated—in the new virtual health record environment. Healthcare executives will need to actively support their HIM teams in accomplishing this transformation.

From Paper to Hybrid to Electronic

The transformation process will encompass three states:

- The current state of the paper health record
- The transition state, a hybrid system with both paper and electronic health records
- The future state of the electronic health record

HIM functions that will be transformed include, but are not limited to, analysis, abstracting, assembly, vital records, coding, data reporting, data quality and integrity, denial management, document identification, documentation training, forms design, chart completion, MPI maintenance, release of information, chargemaster maintenance, and revenue cycle management. Each of these functions will become streamlined, reinvented, or discarded as the HIM function evolves from paper to hybrid to electronic. New functions will also emerge during the transition. Analyzing and visualizing all HIM functions, documented and undocumented, intradepartment and interdepartmental, to chart the transformation of HIM practice is key in transforming to e-HIMTM.

Visioning e-HIM Practice

Envisioning the future of e-HIM can be a daunting task. However, a good visioning approach will help HIM professionals think about the future and ready them for the most significant transition in HIM history. Visioning does not have to be complex. It should include an interactive process that includes a combination of readings and exercises. HIM leaders should understand the principles of change management and transition management and be knowledgeable about the current momentum of the EHR and its impact on HIM practice in healthcare organizations. Securing a senior manager as a change sponsor will be vital for the transition from HIM to e-HIM.

Future Roles of HIM Professionals

Today's 50,000 AHIMA members fulfill a wide variety of roles within the healthcare industry. During the next 10 years these roles will expand and multiply. HIM professionals will continue to work across a variety of healthcare delivery settings. New roles may include business change manager, EHR system manager, IT training specialist, business process engineer, clinical vocabulary manager, workflow and data analyst, consumer advocate, clinical alerts and reminders manager, clinical research coordinator, privacy coordinator, enterprise application specialist, and many more.

HIM professionals will need to continuously upgrade their skills and expertise to keep pace and be successful in the new virtual HIM practice. Healthcare executives, ever mindful of the need to empower and advance their work force, should place a high priority on empowering HIM professionals as key leaders in EHR implementation and management.

Prepared by

Bonnie Cassidy, MPA, RHIA, FAHIMA, FHIMSS
Susan P. Hanson, MBA, RHIA, FAHIMA

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Cassi Birnbaum, RHIA, CPHQ
Cathy Brown-Smith, RHIT
Connie Calvert, RHIA, CCS
Michele D'Ambrosio, MBA, RHIA
Kathy Downing, RHIA, CHP
Marcia Duncan, RHIA
John Eckmann, MPH
Elisa Gorton, MAHSM, RHIA
Paul Gustafson, RHIA
Terri Hall, RHIT, CPC
Kerry Heinecke, RHIA
Lynne Henderson, RHIA
Carol Hermesen, RHIT
Maribeth Hernan, RHIA, CHP
Karl Koob, RHIA
Carol Melvin, RHIA
David Mozie, PhD, RHIA
Sandra Nunn, MS, RHIA, CHP
Cecilia Plata, RHIA, CHP
Carol Ann Quinsey, RHIA, CHPS
Pam Ross, RN, CCS-P
Patty Thierry Sheridan, MBA, RHIA, CCS
Yvette Sylvester, MPA, RHIA, FHIMSS, PMP
Anne Tegen, RHIA
Cecilia Thomson, RHIA
Belinda Wiegand, RHIA

Patricia S. Wilson, RT (R), CPC
Ann Zeisset, RHIT, CCS, CCS-P

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