

HIM Work Force: Where We Are and Where We're Going

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by *Melanie Brodnik, PhD, RHIA*

Where are the jobs? We hear this question in discussions about offshoring of jobs and in presidential debates on the future of the US economy and its work force. I am pleased to say we now know where the jobs are in HIM as a result of the AHIMA work force study initiated in 2002.

AHIMA embarked on this study to assess current and future work force needs, project the types of positions HIM professionals might hold in five to 10 years, and identify the required knowledge and skills needed to be successful in these positions. And indeed, we have reaped a great deal of information from the study and its numerous reports.

In April the AHIMA Board of Directors received the final report, which contained an overall summary and recommendations. While the board is still assessing the outcomes of the study, we felt it was important to share some of the preliminary findings with the membership.

Impact of Technology—Conversion to the electronic health record (EHR) is pivotal to practice since we are losing the thing that has most defined us in the past: the paper medical record. So far, new technology is being used in an old paradigm of practice. However, EHR implementation will rapidly bring in a new paradigm of e-HIMTM and virtual departments, bringing about an opportunity for expanded roles.

Professional Identity—There is a need to revise our professional definition to articulate electronic practice and promote a more global image of our field. While we have a distinct body of knowledge, others such as those in informatics share similar knowledge. We need to find ways for these individuals to participate in our work.

Credentials—Our credentials and competencies have been slow to evolve in the past. We must move more quickly to shorten the time frame between curricula and practice changes. Master's level programs are needed along with increased opportunities for specialty advancement and alternate routes to the field.

Education—Student enrollment in our academic programs must increase, and we need to continue to recruit the best and the brightest students. There is a need to establish programs in underserved areas and offer more online programs. Curricula must adapt rapidly to trends, and the experiential component of education should be strengthened.

Continuing Education and Image Marketing—AHIMA and the CSAs are encouraged to double their efforts to bring high-quality continuing education to HIM professionals to strengthen members' competencies as professional practice changes to e-HIM. Additional specialty certifications should be considered as roles expand. Study results confirm that it is extremely important for us to maintain visible leadership in the EHR at a national level and in our numerous employment settings. Image marketing is a must in all practice settings, especially in the nonacute care environment.

You can read the reports from the work force study at www.ahima.org/fore/practice/workforce.cfm. Take some time to reflect on how you, as an HIM professional, can use this information to further the opportunities awaiting the HIM work force. Only through our efforts can HIM's place in the overall healthcare work force continue to survive and thrive.

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