

HIM—The Cornerstone of Data Integrity: Partnerships Extend Best Practices

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Data integrity is paramount to successfully implementing electronic health records. It is also the foundation of HIM practice.

In order to improve documentation and ensure data integrity, HIM professionals must partner with other healthcare professionals. This can be done in several ways, as AHIMA and its individual members have illustrated.

HIM professionals are also contributing to documentation improvement in three other areas.

Developing HIM Best Practices

AHIMA has worked with industry groups and its own volunteer practice councils to ensure that HIM standards are at the forefront of HIM practice.

AHIMA practice councils and work groups develop guidelines, which are then disseminated through the industry. For example, member volunteers created the “Copy Functionality Toolkit” and “Guidelines for EHR Documentation to Prevent Fraud.”

AHIMA, through a contract with the Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT, researched and published “Report on the Use of Information Technology to Enhance and Expand Health Care Anti-Fraud Activities.” Data integrity serves as the foundation for fraud detection.

AHIMA staff and members participate in standards setting via industry committees such as the Health Level Seven committee working to ensure sound definitions of the legal EHR. Others participate in World Health Organization work groups, the Healthcare Information Technology Standards Panel, and ISO on data integrity issues.

Advocating for HIM

Advocacy is also an important aspect of AHIMA. Through AHIMA’s Hill Day members communicate key issues to their legislators. AHIMA’s DC office also discusses issues with legislators, offers testimony for government work groups, and provides tools that assist members in reaching out to their legislators.

AHIMA depends on its members and staff to advocate and disseminate key HIM issues and best practices. Staying abreast of the various volunteer group and practice council work is important in order to educate other healthcare professionals and policy makers on the importance of HIM.

Partnering for Data Integrity

Clinical data improvement programs are another way HIM professionals help their organizations improve documentation practices. They are most effective when HIM partners with clinical personnel and incorporates clinicians into the program.

The partnership of HIM professionals with nurses can create an avenue for communication with physicians. In turn, nursing and HIM can teach each other, thereby ensuring that the quality of the data in the medical record is improved.

To be effective in documentation integrity HIM professionals must take a leadership role. HIM professionals can do this by participating in industry groups to ensure that HIM’s value is understood, partnering with other healthcare professionals, and acting as advocates for data integrity. Leadership development is a key strategy for AHIMA and the AHIMA Foundation.

As with any quality improvement effort, there is always more to do. HIM best practices need to be communicated and implemented in order for EHRs to be meaningful, effective, and actionable. AHIMA and HIM professionals should continue to partner with other fields and support HIM standards.

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