

HIM's Role in Maintaining Privacy and Security

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In the past several years medical information has made the news, though not in the way HIM professionals would like. Consider the following headlines:

- “Data Breach Hits Close to Home” from the February 22, 2007, *Washington Post*
- “Staff Suspended for Leaking George Clooney Medical Records” from the *NY Daily News* on October 9, 2007
- “Prying in Britney Spears’ Medical Records May Cost Employees’ Jobs” from *Information Week*, March 17, 2008
- “Express Scripts Reports Extortion over Data Breach” from Reuters on November 6, 2008

Famous or not, no one is exempt from disclosure. Privacy and security have become major concerns, especially with the advent of health IT.

Knowing how personal health information is managed within an organization and the greater system is key to building security that reduces and eliminates breaches. HIM professionals can take leading roles in protecting privacy and security and keeping medical information from becoming news.

Data Stewardship

AHIMA has called for the establishment of a national health data stewardship entity. This entity would help coordinate and set standards for the integrity and exchange of healthcare data. (See the December 2008 position statement at www.ahima.org/dc/positions.)

Clearly, we all have a duty to ensure that key attributes for data stewardship are applied at our organizations. These include accountability, transparency, security safeguards, and adequate deidentification of data. If we apply these attributes and other established HIM principles at the local level, we will continue to build an infrastructure that allows for the safe and secure exchange of information.

Personal Health Records

PHRs are another area of opportunity. Through AHIMA’s It’s HI Time, America! campaign, HIM professionals educate consumers on how to maintain their own personal health records. This includes educating them about their authorization rights as well as maintaining privacy and security.

By encouraging consumers to create PHRs, HIM professionals help individuals take greater control of their health information, including who has access to it. Educated consumers are the best customers and add another safeguard for privacy and security.

Privacy and Security in Interoperability

Advances in health IT raise concerns that medical identity theft will thrive with electronically exchanged information. HIM professionals should continue to be diligent about assessing risks that become evident while using electronic information.

AHIMA’s FORE Library: HIM Body of Knowledge has a multitude of articles and research on the subject that members can use to build safeguards around their organizations’ electronic information.

Privacy, security, and confidentiality must be maintained as we continue to move into the electronic world. HIM professionals have a duty to educate their organizations and the public on this topic and support the building of systems that are

interoperable, yet secure. This goes beyond technology.

If we wish to reduce headlines like the ones above, we must share our knowledge and expertise and support the public good in improving healthcare.

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