

# HIM's Role in Reducing Health Disparities

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Health disparities are a major concern in the healthcare industry. Many studies related to health disparities cite the need for accurate and accessible data to identify where the differences in health exist.

“The National Healthcare Disparities Report” from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, for example, states, “A vital step in the effort to eliminate health care disparities is the systematic collection and analysis of healthcare data.”<sup>1</sup>

Without these data, it is difficult to pinpoint what the industry must do to alleviate health disparities. The feature story “Data Collection and Reporting for Healthcare Disparities” in this issue delves into this need.

## Focus on HIM Principles

HIM professionals can play a significant role in reducing these disparities by managing patient health information and ensuring data quality.

HIM professionals can also provide education to local communities. Research has found that “health consumers and providers are confronted with many social, cognitive, and physical obstructions to gathering high quality and valuable information with which to make decisions.”<sup>2</sup>

All participants in the healthcare system need to understand IT and know how to use it. HIM professionals can contribute by educating staff on the personal health record. AHIMA’s “It’s HI Time America” campaign has helped get the message out to the public, but each and every one of us needs to reach out to our communities and offer the education that can improve healthcare delivery.

## Communication Key

Outreach requires understanding the communities where we live and work. We know which groups are affected by health disparities. Using this information, HIM professionals can help address the need for information.

Fitting communication to the audience improves the message’s reception. The Sullivan Commission report “Missing Persons: Minorities in the Health Professions” states just that.<sup>3</sup>

The commission stresses that in order to relieve health disparities in minority populations, the country must increase the number of minorities in the health professions, or rather increase diversity in the health professions. This should apply to all health professions, especially those that touch patients. And the HIM profession certainly does.

Broader diversity strengthens the profession and brings HIM closer to achieving quality healthcare through quality information.

## Notes

1. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. “The National Healthcare Disparities Report.” February 2004. Available online at [www.ahrq.gov/qual/nhdr03/nhdrsum03.htm](http://www.ahrq.gov/qual/nhdr03/nhdrsum03.htm).
2. Yakel, Elizabeth, et al. “Improving African American Birth Outcomes by Understanding Information Seeking Processes.” Available online at [www.rcgd.isr.umich.edu/prba/perspectives/fall2005/yakel.pdf](http://www.rcgd.isr.umich.edu/prba/perspectives/fall2005/yakel.pdf).
3. Sullivan Commission. “Missing Persons: Minorities in the Health Professions.” 2004. Available online at [www.aacn.nche.edu/Media/pdf/SullivanReport.pdf](http://www.aacn.nche.edu/Media/pdf/SullivanReport.pdf).

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