

HIM's Time to Lead

[Save to myBoK](#)

By Chris Dimick

This is HIM's time to shine. Rita Bowen, MA, RHIA, CHPS, SSGB, sees the current debate on national healthcare reform as a great opportunity for HIM professionals to increase their prominence in the healthcare world. The new AHIMA president feels HIM has a lot to offer the conversation and needs to get engaged.

"I want us to get beyond 'I can't do this because I am just this or that,'" Bowen says. "Realize, we may have a lot of diversity in what we do, but if we come together with one voice and one mission of what we are really after, we can make a huge contribution. Because as an association, as professionals, as the best and sometimes only vocal advocate for what we know is best for health information, we must be ready to play, to lead, to win."

Being elected president is a highlight for Bowen, who throughout her distinguished career has worked on spreading HIM's message. She has been an HIM director, consultant, and privacy officer, and she currently works as the enterprise director for HIM services at Erlanger Health System, based in Chattanooga, TN.

Time to Lead

Bowen knows she is becoming president of the association at a pivotal time for the profession. Healthcare leadership opportunities abound for HIM professionals as facilities begin to implement electronic health record systems, which will require HIM guidance. Health IT and privacy provisions in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and other federal initiatives will have an impact on HIM, creating the need for leaders to ensure sound HIM principles are kept intact through the changes.

Bowen firmly believes that the HIM profession will rise to the occasion, that the times demand of us an occasion that calls for our contribution to a meaningful part of healthcare reform.

"We come to this critical point in history more eager and better prepared to do that which needs doing in the health information management arena than ever before," she said in her incoming presidential address during AHIMA's 2009 Convention and Exhibit.

Change is not new to the profession, Bowen says. The constant change HIM seems to live in has kept Bowen interested in her work over the last 30 years.

"I love that constant motion," she says. "[HIM] is never done-it is like it is constantly being refined and even now, we are moving into e-HIM and it is time for us to deliver on behalf of the healthcare consumer. In fact, the one thing that there is no time for is complacency.

"We need to push the boundaries of HIM, to utilize new technology that improves patient care by creating information capable of securing better and safer care," she says. "In the year ahead we will be called upon to offer input regarding standards, tools, education, and legal and regulatory incentives that maintain, share, and use health information for reliable and continuous improvement of healthcare."

As healthcare changes, HIM professionals are responsible for ensuring HIM principles, such as data quality and record integrity, are kept in mind both at the facility and national level.

"If we don't [promote] quality and data integrity, who is going to do that?" Bowen asks. "We have to quit sitting back. We must increase our space in physician practices as partners in making the electronic health record workflow redesigns useful and resulting information meaningful in a format more readable and digestible. Having an EHR is about much, much more than getting rid of paper. It is about creating a connected, well-planned continuum of care that ensures the very best outcomes for the largest number of patients."

Bowen states we have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to push the boundaries that currently divide us from the best of one another.

HIM is no longer a siloed department. Health information touches all points of an organization, and an HIM department should operate under this new premise by getting out and working directly with those people who create the information, Bowen says. “We must continue to work with individuals regarding how they engage in building quality health information and how the patient can participate in this process.”

Doing so requires solid leadership skills. “To be any kind of leader you have to have confidence, you have to trust yourself, and you have to trust the people that you are working with,” Bowen says.

Mentoring in HIM

Good leaders learn with the help of other leaders, the two learning from and supporting each other. Mentoring played a big role in Bowen’s career, and now she routinely returns the favor.

A recent recipient of the FORE Mentor Triumph Award, Bowen routinely encourages other HIM professionals to become mentors. She has hired new graduates looking for their first break, encouraged employees to head back to school, and helped employees work their way up into management.

“Mentoring helps people grow,” she says. “You can get so much through education, but it is people skills, it is the process of interacting and working with people, that I think mentoring helps you work through.”

Mentoring is not one-sided, and Bowen is quick to point out she gets something in return beyond a fuzzy feeling. She routinely learns about the profession from her mentees and has gained some lifelong friends in the process.

“We must assist our employers, our communities, and one another in moving health information management to the next level and the level above that. We must continually leverage emerging trends that redefine and expand HIM’s domain. We need to mentor one another and push one another to innovate and perform at our personal best,” she says.

“Here in this unique space in time, we have a chance to create our profession into something that will mean more to the people we will become and world we will inhabit. We need to help one another lead America’s transition to 21st-century health information management. Every member is needed and must participate in this historic sea of change in healthcare and health information management.”

Path to President

Bowen’s path to becoming president was a gradual one. When she first started volunteering with AHIMA, she didn’t have presidential aspirations. She just wanted to get involved.

Today her AHIMA volunteer resume is long and includes serving as president of the Arizona and Tennessee CSAs. She helped develop the CHP and CHS credential exams and for three years served on the Council on Certification. Having served on the AHIMA Board of Directors since 2006, the thought of becoming president soon began to whisper in Bowen’s ear. A conversation with her father-another of her mentors-just months before he died in 2006 helped Bowen listen to those presidential whispers.

Her father asked her if she was going to run for AHIMA president. Bowen mentioned she had some interest but wasn’t sure.

“And he said, ‘I think you should. It may just be the thing that you are meant to do,’” she says. “And that stuck with me.”

Her father reminded her to be herself and “speak from the heart” if she did decide to run.

“He said, ‘Don’t worry about your look or your view, it is the message that you are sending out to people [that matters],’” she says. “‘And if they know you mean it from your heart, they are going to receive it that way.’”

Bowen says she hopes to embody that advice during her tenure as AHIMA president.

Chris Dimick (chris.dimick@ahima.org) is staff writer for the *Journal of AHIMA*.

Article citation:

Dimick, Chris. "HIM's Time to Lead" *Journal of AHIMA* 81, no.1 (January 2010): 10-11.

Driving the Power of Knowledge

Copyright 2022 by The American Health Information Management Association. All Rights Reserved.