

Health IT Moves from Conversation to Action

Save to myBoK

by Linda Kloss, RHIA, CAE, chief executive officer

The Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society's 2006 conference featured more than 800 vendors displaying technologies from electronic health records (EHRs) to PDAs. Health IT is a booming industry. Global spending on health IT is projected to exceed \$100 billion in 2006, with more strong growth expected in the coming years.¹

As a cosponsor of this annual trade show, AHIMA representatives scour the exhibit hall to identify the latest technologies and cover educational sessions on up-and-coming HIM trends. Each year, I come away from the show with a general impression that sums up the state of HIM. In 1999 it was all about preparing for Y2K. In 2001 and 2002 HIPAA was the main focus. The EHR took center stage in 2004, and it continues to remain there.

However, this year's focus shifted from discussions about the benefits of EHRs to real experiences, including implementation challenges and critical uses for the technology. Sure, there is still a lot of hype at a show of this size, but the debate is essentially over. We are now hunkered down to figure out--as a team--how to transition to a digital healthcare system.

The EHR and HIM

In "CIO Calling" Todd Stein presents advice from CIOs about the value of HIM to successful health IT implementations. HIM professionals are subject matter experts in information, workflow, policies, and standards. The transition to electronic health information management requires our full engagement and participation. The legal record, a core HIM focus, is gaining recognition as an important issue, as are topics such as authentication, retention, and, of course, data quality. If EHRs are to deliver the savings and benefits touted on the exhibit floor, information and records management functionality have to improve, and HIM professionals must show the way.

If your organization is now planning for the EHR and your staff needs a better understanding of the EHR, flag the article "Speaking of EHRs" by Michael J. McCoy, B.J. Bomentre, and Kate Crous and pass this issue around.

Interoperability Gains

"Lessons from Katrina" provides a snapshot of the experiences of some HIM professionals in the Gulf states. The stark contrast between organizations with digital and paper records in the Gulf laid to rest the debate over the benefits of going electronic. We congratulate our colleagues who devised solutions to unimaginable challenges and are now rebuilding the Gulf to become a model for digital health.

In "The Language of Health Data Exchange" Meryl Bloomrosen and Kevin Heubusch review today's concepts of the emerging nationwide health information network. They review how the conversation is evolving on the ground in communities and states and through private and public projects now under way. (For more on health information exchange, see the new health information exchange resource page on the AHIMA Web site at www.ahima.org/hie [web page no longer available].)

The health IT conversation may seem discordant at times, with so many paths being pursued by so many stakeholders, but these conversations all come back to a common vision: improving healthcare through the deployment of health IT to benefit patients. We must all be part of these conversations because the HIM perspective is essential to the dialogue and the solutions.

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Note

1. Gartner. "Healthcare Provider IT Spending Forecast, 2004-2009." August 30, 2005.

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Driving the Power of Knowledge

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