

# In Pursuit of a Value-added Entity

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The integration of various clinical services into larger healthcare alliances or enterprises challenges the very basic managerial foundations of our healthcare industry. While senior managers and clinicians struggle to run their respective organizations or divisions following traditional principles, methods, and ethics, the challenges of technology, regulations, financial incentives, and public demands place an entirely new dimension on healthcare management. Clinicians, hospitals, and health plans are increasingly held accountable for results.

The very fact that so much of medicine can be tracked and measured today highlights the degree to which clinical data has risen as a value-added entity—not only within a healthcare organization, but externally as well. Transforming clinical data into information (which equates to knowledge) has been our mantra for some time. But never before has it been so visible as it is today. The need for accurate, high-quality information to support the management of our nation's complex healthcare delivery system is greater than ever. Clinical information and treatment results are expected by employers, who need it to manage their healthcare benefits programs, and patients, who demand to know potential risks, outcomes, and the quality of providers to make informed decisions about their personal healthcare needs.

The terms "knowledge officer" and "knowledge management" have appeared frequently in the public media, particularly highlighting the need for trained individuals who can harness and structure the information resources of an organization. To know your business inside and out in the corporate world, information mining is essential: its resources, costs, processes, customers, and competition. Knowledge management also means predicting the strategic direction of the business. The requirements of information expertise and quality are fundamental to any organization. Knowledge management means structuring, gathering, integrating, organizing, analyzing, and presenting information. A knowledge officer's job is to create systems and strategies to carry out these concepts.

## Showcasing Our Talents

Forgive me for using this analogy, but recently the corporate librarian has seen a resurgence in opportunities within successful business enterprises. Librarians act as filters, consultants, and analysts, obviously reinventing themselves to fit a modern application of their talents. In the HIM profession, our expertise is based in healthcare and our commodity is clinical data. We must recognize that we manage very powerful information. This is shown in the potential impact of various tasks we manage, such as structuring, gathering, interpreting, integrating, and analyzing information, placing quality controls on data generated from within our organizations, and understanding the workflow processes of the organization.

Our knowledge of the capabilities and insufficiencies of today's technology should make us invaluable to our enterprises. Perhaps we have not promoted ourselves or highlighted our capabilities in ways that alert senior management of the potential of our professional stature. Technology provides an overload of data. It takes an expert in knowledge management to sort through and shape the output of technology into meaningful forms and to interpret the significance of trends and patterns in a realistic application.

Just as other healthcare senior managers and clinicians continue to hold on to the vestiges of historic practice while searching for new ways to stabilize this complex business of healthcare delivery, we also hold on to traditional HIM practices. I believe we have a new destiny. There is much competition for the title and concept of health information manager with position descriptions that cover a wide range of activities—including the realm of information systems management.

## A New Direction

As the dawn of a new century approaches, we need to carve out a new professional direction. Now is the time to capitalize on the power of quality clinical data and its critical value in strategic decision-making to capture the attention of senior level

healthcare executives. We should make ourselves even more visible through our actions and opportunities, demonstrating the unique qualifications of our profession. We have the Vision 2006 roles for which AHIMA continues to develop career paths, educational programming, and role-model profiles. A thread that weaves through each Vision 2006 role is the ability to work with and maintain quality clinical information. And what does this become to the user? Knowledge. We can shine as expert interpreters as we navigate the maze of the regulatory environment. We can assure that information technology really does support the daily work processes of healthcare delivery in any setting. We can craft new approaches to maintain the quality accreditation standards expected by the consumer public. Most important, we should be able to analyze and present the information generated by various technological resources into realistic, usable knowledge.

Achieving this requires stretching our sights to a new destiny while maintaining a firm grip on current processes. It means keeping our eyes open for opportunities outside of the usual daily practice, where our expertise can make a difference. It means volunteering for a new project or responsibility and making it a success. I recently heard a remark about maintaining yourself as a business. The business, YOU, Inc., has a "Board of Advisors" that helps you chart a new course for yourself, whether it is for a major career transition or to modestly add new enthusiasm and challenge to your current job or your personal life.

For instance, AHIMA, Inc. has put together a "Board of Advisors" of sorts by tapping into the thoughts and ideas of others outside our profession in various ways: through this year's expanded strategic work session in January, the Coding Futures Task Force, membership on the Board of the Joint Healthcare Information Technology Alliance (JHITA), and other strategic association alliances. You'll learn more about these undertakings as the progress and products of their collective efforts are published in future issues of the Journal. Essentially, we are all seeking the right composition and focus for our HIM profession, to create and sustain a new destiny. We manage the information that becomes knowledge to the user. Let's find ways to strengthen our roles in the healthcare industry, and to realize improvements and efficiencies in the results of the healthcare delivered.

## References

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