Informatics Poses Challenges, but Promises Rewards

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Informatics is one of the pillars of AHIMA's strategy. And many people agree that it's a critical part of the profession. But when we're in the middle of doing our daily work, it's easy to think of informatics as something that's done by somebody else.

It's getting easier to find examples of informatics in action. We frequently see headlines about new initiatives that aim to use health data to effect transformational change. For instance, earlier this year the Obama administration announced its "Precision Medicine Initiative," which aims to produce more individualized treatments based on factors such as genetics, the environment, and lifestyles. The President's 2016 budget proposes to invest $215 million to pioneer "patient-powered research," with an initial focus on cancer.[1] The initiative proposes to engage a million or more citizens to volunteer to contribute their health data to improve health outcomes.

This initiative depends on health data. Francis Collins, director of the National Institutes of Health, said as much in an interview with Reuters, noting that the key to success would be using medical records from different systems and making them work together. "That doesn't necessarily mean all of the data is in one place being operated by the same software," but the data must be "exquisite," Collins said in the interview. "That's not easy."[2]

These developments, and others, signal that it's time for a change. It's time for HIM professionals to step up to do the work that can help transform data into knowledge and drive decisions.

Everything we do is related to informatics. But many of us still need education in this area in order to do the work. The articles in this month's *Journal* start to show us the way. In "Workaday Informatics," Mary Butler provides examples of informatics that are being used in healthcare facilities every day to improve care processes and information management. In "Data Analysis Starter Kit," Diane Dolezel, MSCS, RHIA, helps demystify some of the tools used in data analysis and provides a practical starting point. Donald M. Voltz, MD, suggests the industry take another look at "middleware" as a solution to the perennial problem of connecting disconnected EHR systems in "Connecting the Disparate: Middleware's Role in Solving Healthcare's EHR Interoperability Problems."

Priscilla Keeton, MS, RHIT, and Patricia Pierson, RHIA, offer practical steps everyone can use to land the HIM jobs of the future in "e-HIM Professionals Wanted." And for the 50,000-foot view, "Scanning the HIM Environment," by Anna Desai, MHA, CAE, summarizes the latest environmental scan report created by the House of Delegates' Envisioning Collaborative.

Informatics is more than a buzzword. It poses new challenges but also promises great rewards. With our knowledge and insights into data, HIM professionals can help make the promise a reality.

Notes

1. The White House, Office of the Press Secretary. "Fact Sheet: President Obama's Precision Medicine Initiative." January 30, 2015. www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/01/30/fact-sheet-president-obama-s-precision-medicine-initiative.
2. Steenhuysen, Julie. "NIH director sees solving data puzzle as key to U.S. precision medicine." Reuters. March 6, 2015. www.reuters.com/article/2015/03/07/us-usa-health-precision-idUSKBN0M302520150307.

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