

# Information Governance— Are You On Board?

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*By Ann Meehan, RHIA*

If you are reading this blog you are curious about information governance (IG), learning about IG, or on board with IG. Our goal is to get all members of AHIMA on board with IG.

Let's start with a definition of IG. AHIMA defines information governance as an organization-wide framework for managing information throughout its lifecycle and for supporting the organization's strategy, operations, regulatory, legal, risk, and environmental requirements. You may ask...What does that really mean? Let's break the definition into key phrases:

- **Organization-wide.** IG should cross every business unit or entity of the healthcare organization. It's not just specific to health information management or IT, but to any area where information is used.
- **Framework.** A formal IG program provides the infrastructure around "all things information." It provides the oversight necessary to ensure consistency and standardization around how information is managed.
- **Lifecycle.** Adding to the above, the lifecycle of information addresses how it's handled from beginning to end: from creation, generation, and capture to its use and to reporting and ultimately to disposition.
- **Organization's strategy.** Information must support the healthcare organization's strategy goals and direction. Most organizations want to provide quality patient care, serve the community, and reduce costs, to name a few. Take a look at your organization's mission, value, and goals and think of those in terms of information.

Organizations can no longer assume that its information is trustworthy. A formal program is needed to ensure that information is managed and monitored. It's the ethical obligation of an organization to ensure the trustworthiness of its information.

You may now ask, "Why is this important to me?" As an HIM professional, no matter whether your role is in HIM management, coding, CDI, quality, analytics, or somewhere else, you play a significant role in the management of information. IG offers an incredible leadership opportunity to HIM professionals, or at the very least, a seat at the IG table. HIM professionals should become engaged and strive to move their organizations toward IG.

Next question, "Why do we need IG?" There are many reasons why IG is needed. Let's discuss a few of the drivers:

- **To provide quality patient care.** No one is going to disagree that quality patient care is at the heart of every healthcare organization. It's why we do what we do. It's why we are in business. Many factors come together and result in quality patient care, but having complete, accurate, timely, and available information is needed by clinicians in order to have the most current knowledge of the patient's condition. Without it, clinicians are second guessing. Additionally, payment reform under the Medicare Access and CHIP Reauthorization Act of 2015 (MACRA) includes a quality component for provider payment.
- **The need to reduce costs.** Healthcare organizations are under a lot of pressure to reduce costs, all the while technology and other innovations are costly. Where do organizations focus on cost reductions? Organizations focus on staffing and operations. Rework, duplication of effort, and lack of standardization are examples of inefficiencies that are expensive. Information governance directs organizational standardization of policies, definitions, guidelines, reporting, and overall expectations that push out inefficiencies. It's much less expensive to touch something one time than to have to touch it multiple times. The key is to move problem solving toward a root cause analysis method rather than a reactive approach. MACRA also includes cost reduction in provider payment incentives.
- **Right patient—right information—right time.** Tying very closely to quality care and reduced costs, having information on the right patient at the right time will ensure that information is available for patient care and will reduce, if not eliminate, the need for repeated tests, thus reducing costs and risks to the patient. Being more efficient with patient care will also reduce patient out-of-pocket costs and serve as a patient satisfier.
- **Big data is more than a catch phrase.** Big data is just that... a lot of data coming from various sources that is growing exponentially each day. Not only do we have data from clinical and financial systems, but now take into

consideration the various wearables and patient-generated health data which could be health surveys and at home monitoring. While all of this data is absolutely wonderful, organizations must be able to harness it, ensure its integrity, and use it appropriately. IG will provide the needed infrastructure to do just that.

The list of IG drivers goes on and on, but these are just a few.

If you are already on board with IG, it's important to know where your program is on the journey. Being able to quantify the level of IG maturity is key to knowing where to focus efforts and in putting together a road map for maturity.

If you are not yet on board with IG, tap into the many information governance resources available at AHIMA and elsewhere. Also, be sure to make yourself more familiar with the top drivers for a formal information governance program, including big data, interoperability, population health, and patient engagement.

Once you have a solid understanding of what IG is and why it's critical to the future of your organization, you will then be ready to get in front of leadership and key stakeholders and help them on board.

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