

Just Keep Swimming

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It's easy to feel overwhelmed as we work to navigate the dizzying speed with which technology is changing healthcare delivery-and every aspect of health information management practice. I often draw on my background as a competitive swimmer to help me address the resulting significant shifts that are taking shape. Swimming competitively from childhood through college, I learned a lot about the enormous capacity we all possess to perform, even under the most challenging conditions.

Lessons from the Pool

My teammates taught me how to confidently compete as a team player, my parents showed me the importance of a support system, and from my coaches I learned the discipline of daily training. I also learned how to adapt to changing conditions, approaching unknown circumstances with confidence and careful preparation.

The time I most often felt overwhelmed as a swimmer was when I needed to let go of old, familiar techniques in order to master a new stroke that would ultimately improve my ability to compete. Changes in the way HIM services are delivered, moving from a centralized to decentralized model, also require us to embrace a new way of thinking. We need to reassess how we view HIM services, and consider how best to organize and distribute them across an organization.

A World of Opportunities

HIM services are now found in many different kinds of healthcare organizations and in many departments-quality management, revenue cycle, legal, risk, compliance, patient safety, information technology, informatics, nursing, cancer registry, training and development, project management, smaller HIM departments, and centralized "service centers," just to name a few. All of these new venues provide tremendous opportunity for the healthcare industry to recognize the subject matter expertise and value provided by HIM professionals in coding and classification, information integrity, information governance, EHR implementation and use, e-discovery, clinical documentation improvement, regulatory requirements, health information exchange, and privacy and security.

I am often asked where all these opportunities are. They are everywhere! To remain competitive and relevant, we need to change our world view of HIM and define HIM services and organization ourselves. Our challenge is to think about delivering HIM services in new ways and to provide the necessary leadership to follow through, especially for information governance and information integrity. Preparing ourselves with new skills and forging ahead with confidence into uncharted waters opens up opportunities we may not have previously considered.

Just as I had confidence in my teammates, I know that AHIMA members will take on the task of learning new skills and keeping an ear open to our coaches' advice. With some hard work and practice, we can change the mechanics of our "stroke" to perform and compete successfully, creating new ways of thinking and delivering HIM services to the healthcare industry. Investing in our education enables us to be responsive to the needs of the organizations and the community we serve-so even when the changes feel overwhelming, we must keep swimming. Dream Big!

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