

# Leading the Mad Dash to HIPAA Compliance

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by Jessica Squazzo, assistant editor

When many HIM professionals might have shuddered at the thought of taking on HIPAA implementation, LaVonne Wieland, RHIT, decided to stare it right in the face. For Wieland, the information privacy director for HealthEast Care System in St. Paul, MN, the privacy director position seemed like a natural next step.

“I have been very fortunate in that I just fell into many of my career steps,” she says. “Each one got me to the next one without me even realizing it.”

## New Job, New Regulations

Wieland spent several years in coding before taking the information privacy director job. “I was in the coding and reimbursement world when HIPAA hit us,” Wieland says. “I was ready for a career change, and the little bit I was reading about HIPAA was intriguing me.”

Wieland credits her strong HIM background for preparing her for her current position. Prior to her role at HealthEast, Wieland spent seven years as a coder in a hospital. She then worked as a consultant for more than two years. She also served as health information manager for a large physician clinic organization with more than 20 primary care and multispecialty clinics and then pursued consulting again.

“I remember seeing a couple of job ads when it was called 'a temporary position for a privacy officer.' When April 14 hits, this [job] does not go away”

—LaVonne Wieland, RHIT, information privacy director,  
HealthEast Care System, St. Paul, MN

Wieland has been with HealthEast for almost two years and is responsible for implementing the HIPAA privacy regulations. A colleague of Wieland's takes care of the security aspect, which has made a daunting task more manageable. “It helped make all the madness a little easier to deal with,” she says. Some of Wieland's current projects include policy and procedure development and education and training.

## Address Gaps First

As an information privacy director, Wieland has some advice for those who are panicking about meeting HIPAA deadlines. She says an organization must determine where its areas of noncompliance are. Then, “Get those in place first,” she says. “If you've got a system or program in place, continue to pursue all identified gaps.”

## Keeping Busy

Outside of work, Wieland is involved in a number of professional activities. She has served as chair for numerous AHIMA councils, has written articles of the *Journal* and other AHIMA publications, and has coauthored a book, *CPT/HCPCS Coding and Reimbursement for Physician Services*. She is currently the president-elect of the Minnesota Health Information Management Association and serves as a facilitator of the Geographic: Minnesota Community of Practice.

Though all those activities may seem overwhelming, Wieland is quick to say that the benefits of being involved are priceless. “The rewards you get from it totally outweigh the time you put into it,” she says. “Everyone needs to have that opportunity.”

## After the Mad Dash

What happens after the April 14 implementation date? Plenty, according to Wieland. “Some days I think, ‘What am I going to do when this mad dash is over?’” But she is confident that the privacy rule implementation is just the beginning. “Once you implement, you’ve got to learn to improve it,” she says. “More opportunities will come from this.”

With a long road ahead for HIPAA and HIM, it’s a good thing Wieland has found a perfect fit.

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