

# Let's Place Patients Front and Center

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As HIM professionals, one of our key responsibilities is to provide patients with access to their health information. A poll conducted by Wolters Kluwer Health in November 2012 focused on the consumerization of healthcare. The poll asked whether consumers really want more control of their healthcare and if they feel prepared to assume responsibility. While consumers indicated that they wanted more control over their healthcare, the poll found that adoption of personal health records is lagging.

Only one in five respondents reported that they have their own electronic personal health record (PHR). However, respondents did note that the ability to communicate via e-mail with their physician and the ability to schedule appointments online were important, as was the use of mobile devices or computers in office visits.

The stage 2 “meaningful use” EHR Incentive Program rules require providers to have at least five percent of patients using a portal. Many HIM professionals are now implementing and using patient portals in their facilities. The use of patient portals has changed the release of information function in those organizations. I recently had the opportunity to use a patient portal to retrieve and review my lab results. I was also able to e-mail the results to one of my physicians prior to an office visit. The portal eliminated my need to visit my doctor’s office and request that a copy be sent to another provider.

The proposed rules for stage 3 meaningful use focus even more on patient engagement. Under the stage 3 requirements, there will be a need for patient input for reconciliation of the medical record, a move towards real-time availability of information for patients and caregivers, and the ability to submit patient-generated information. This will certainly allow patients to be more engaged in their healthcare.

The Bipartisan Policy Center Health Project released a report called “Improving Quality and Reducing Costs in Health Care: Engaging Consumers Using Electronic Tools” in December 2012. The report notes that while patient-centered care and patient engagement are goals that have been widely embraced, efforts must be focused on integrating these concepts into the healthcare system. Both patients and providers identified concerns about privacy and security. AHIMA and HIM professionals can show leadership in this area by educating patients on how their privacy is protected and what patients can do to help protect their health information.

Another area of concern identified by patients who have a PHR is the inability to connect with electronic health records (EHRs) maintained by their providers. Providers are concerned about the quality and reliability of information in PHRs. As the healthcare industry implements EHRs and patients increase utilization of PHRs, there will be a real need for individuals to understand their health information. AHIMA has published a guide for consumers, “Understanding Your Medical Record,” on [www.myPHR.com](http://www.myPHR.com). I encourage you to review this document.

While traditional functions such as release of information will change, there will be new roles for HIM professionals that will focus on patient engagement. Believe in yourself and believe in the value you contribute as an HIM professional.

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