

Looking Back at AHIMA's Early Years

Save to myBoK

By Kathleen A. Frawley, JD, MS, RHIA, FAHIMA

AHIMA celebrates its 85th anniversary this year. Many current healthcare associations were founded after the Joint Commission was founded in 1951. AHIMA, however, was founded in 1928 when 35 members of the Club of Record Clerks met at the Hospital Standardization Conference sponsored by the American College of Surgeons (ACS). At the close of the meeting, the Association of Record Librarians of North America (ARLNA) was formed.

AHIMA's library collection contains the original bulletins of ARLNA, which were published quarterly. The first bulletin discussed the group's first annual conference in 1929 and its efforts to organize and decide on a publication.

The convention proceedings and sessions published in the bulletin include:

- A president's address by founder Grace Whiting Myers
- Training of record librarians
- "Fundamental Principles to be Observed in Developing an Efficient Cross Index"
- "Innovations in Diagnosis and Terminology to Facilitate the Answering of Requests for Histories and the Recording of Clinical Histories"
- A demonstration of filing systems in Chicago hospitals
- "A Uniform Stand by Hospitals in Replying to Legitimate and Nonlegitimate Inquiries from Insurance Companies and Others"
- Paragraphs from the convention banquet that included remarks by the president of the American Hospital Association and the secretary of council on intern education and hospitals at the American Medical Association
- "The Role of the Record Librarian in Maintaining an Efficient Record System"
- "The Record Taker to Point the Way to the Cure of Cancer"
- "Correlation of the Medical Library and Medical Record Department"
- "The Nurse's Contribution to the Medical Record"
- "Symposium – Relations of the Record Librarian..."
 - To the Nursing Department
 - To the Business Department
 - To the Anaesthetic Department"

The Report of the Committee on the Promotion of Membership indicated that as of October 1929, there were 139 members and one honorary member of ARLNA. Twenty-five of the 48 states were represented as well as Washington, DC, Hawaii, and Canada.

Myers concluded her President's Address with a look to the future-of the organization and the profession. "I dare to look forward to a day when this association shall hold the first international congress of record librarians." I find it amazing that our first president was so visionary. The International Federation of Health Information Management Associations (IFHIMA, formerly known as IFHRO) was formed in 1968. The 17th IFHIMA Congress and General Assembly will take place May 13-15 in Montreal.

As we deal with the many challenges facing HIM professionals today, it is important to look at the issues our founders were addressing at the time: release of information, indexing of diagnoses and operations, record systems, master patient index, and the use of Soundex and cancer records. The more things change, the more they stay the same. Believe!

Kathleen A. Frawley (kathleen.frawley@ahima.org) is professor and chair of health information technology at DeVry University, based in North Brunswick, NJ.

Article citation:

Frawley, Kathleen A.. "Looking Back at AHIMA's Early Years" *Journal of AHIMA* 84, no.4 (April 2013): 10.

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