

Make HIM Education a Professional Priority

Save to myBoK

by Barbara P. Fuller, JD, RHIA

This month, I want to draw your attention to our HIM education programs. Those of us who are not intimately involved in HIM education are sometimes under the false impression that these essential programs are functioning well enough and do not need our care and support. Yet nothing could be further from the truth.

In 1999, the Joint Committee on Education (JCE) was charged with the task of assessing the health of HIM education programs and, as a result, produced the white paper "The Health and Well-being of Professional Education in the Health Information Management Profession."¹ The paper must be read, pondered, and discussed not only by educators but by those of us who are not educators as well. The responsibilities and concerns in this paper belong to all of us.

A History of Challenges

The white paper was not the first study of this vital topic. The JCE reviewed a number of studies and reports on our educational process. The striking finding was that so little has changed: concerns identified in earlier writings mirrored many of those in the 1999 study. Challenges in marketing the profession to prospective students, image problems, difficulty in attracting the "best and the brightest," and low growth in baccalaureate programs are issues that have appeared in reports produced from the 1940s onward.

What does this say about our priorities? For too long, those of us engaged in tackling change in the HIM environment have left our educator colleagues on their own. We have expected them to produce the human resources we need, but we have not considered the unchanging nature of many challenges in their academic setting.

A Future of Progress

Curriculum reform and development of a culture of innovation head the list of five major categories identified by the white paper. Curriculum reform was addressed by a task force, and review is ongoing this year. But innovation in education depends on a continuous exchange of new ideas between educators, practitioners, and the world at large, which can be difficult to achieve with the level of energy required just to survive in today's HIM environment.

The need to increase research efforts is another category of concern in the white paper. Continued marketplace value of HIM as a profession is directly dependent on the growth of research activity. This is an urgent need that must be addressed.

The paper also addresses building the image of the HIM profession. An expansion of marketing efforts to increase enrollment is essential for the viability of our education programs. Even a casual review of job opportunities indicates that the demand for graduates of our education programs has never been stronger. Implementation of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996, with its emphasis on privacy and confidentiality, is expected to create thousands of new jobs. Never before has our profession offered such diverse opportunities to students. Never before have we been able to point with pride to members as they move into roles in top-level management, finance, law, consulting, education, entrepreneurship, or equally important, as they choose roles in hospitals, long-term care facilities, clinics, physicians' offices, or other patient care environments.

It's Your Turn

It is not my intent to paraphrase the entire white paper in this column, so I hope you will review this important document that is so fundamental to the well-being of our profession. There is much more in the white paper than has been touched on here. Then, I hope to focus your interest and enlist your support for its recommendations. Many of the recommendations are institutional in nature and are already being addressed in various ways by AHIMA staff and volunteers. However, many of the

recommendations can be claimed and addressed by each of us. We all can-and must-be committed to the fulfillment of these recommendations. The health and viability of our educational programs rest in all our hands.

Note

1. "The Health and Well-being of Professional Education in the Health Information Management Profession" is available at www.ahima.org/ihimle/bbs/.

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