

Making a Commitment to Privacy Protection

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by Jewelle Hicks, newsletter editor

Debra Minzola, RHIA, knows quite a bit about privacy protection. As the director of information security and HIPAA compliance for MedQuist, she is responsible for designing, implementing, and monitoring all aspects of the organization's privacy and security program. That alone may seem like a daunting task, but Minzola wears many additional hats. Training the company's work force, documenting and resolving privacy and security complaints, coordinating incident investigations, conducting risk assessments, and acting as a resource for clients and employees all fall under her domain.

"I decided on HIM when I was 15 years old and not once have I ever doubted or regretted my decision. I have witnessed our profession change drastically from year to year and take on new roles. It has been an incredible evolution."

—Debra Minzola, RHIA, director of information security and HIPAA compliance, MedQuist.

The Road Less Traveled

Minzola was drawn to a career in HIM at age 15. A guidance counselor urged her to try a software program that gave career recommendations based on responses to a series of questions. When the program recommended a career in hospital administration, Minzola researched the field and related degrees and ultimately found an HIM program at Temple University. "What interested me in HIM was its uniqueness, something different than the traditional degrees the majority of my classmates were choosing to pursue. My mind was set on the road less traveled," says Minzola.

After working for 10 years in both an associate and director's role at a university hospital system, Minzola moved to her current position at MedQuist. "A significant turning point in my career was the decision to take 10 years of hospital HIM experience and make the leap to a nontraditional role as a corporate director of information security in a major healthcare technology company," she says.

A Balancing Act

Minzola's list of current projects reads like a checklist for privacy protection. Developing the company's HIPAA infrastructure, establishing and rolling out HIPAA awareness and education plans to the entire work force, assessing client contracts for business associate language, and answering clients' HIPAA-related questions are all part of her daily work.

Minzola balances these multiple responsibilities by keeping up to date with changes in the field. Although it can be difficult to stay ahead of the constant flow of information, she reviews all the educational journals, Web sites, and listservs available and whittles them down to the three that best meet her educational needs, allowing her to focus on information that will assist her on the job.

A Sense of Adventure

Minzola said learning the extensive terminology related to security technology was a challenge. "I thought learning medical acronyms and abbreviations was a daunting task, but information technology acronyms are just as voluminous as those in the medical profession," she says. Another career challenge has been establishing a corporate culture change in privacy practices for employees in 50 states, 90 percent of whom telecommute.

Minzola describes the most rewarding aspect of her career as the ability to eliminate the “deer in the headlights” expression that appears when HIPAA is mentioned to clients: “I watch their fear dissipate when they realize there is a resource dedicated to navigating and guiding them through the complex and nebulous requirements of HIPAA. The excitement of applying my skill sets and HIM knowledge to a fairly new position within the healthcare industry and contributing to the molding of my role as it develops is adventurous, motivational, and rewarding.”

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Driving the Power of Knowledge

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