

Managing Knowledge Workers

Save to myBoK

by Linda Kloss, RHIA, CAE, executive vice president/CEO

Many were caught by surprise last October when the *San Francisco Chronicle* ran a story about a disgruntled medical transcriber from Pakistan who threatened to release confidential patient data if she did not get paid.¹ When the full story was revealed, we learned that the University of California at San Francisco (UCSF) Medical Center had outsourced its transcription to a firm that subcontracted the work to a second firm. The second firm then sub-subcontracted to a third firm that hired the transcriber in Pakistan. She certainly got the attention of the press and lawmakers in the US ... and she quickly got her paycheck.

The prestigious UCSF Medical Center appears not to have been aware that its transcription work had been subcontracted three times over and was actually being done a half a world away.

This event signals the need for HIM professionals entrusted with safeguarding personal health data to redouble their efforts to learn to do so effectively through remote staff and outsourcing. The field needs to research, develop, and promulgate best practices and do so quickly.

A Continuum of Solutions

This month's feature articles address managing new processes, remote staff, and effective outsourcing. Mary Brandt offers advice about organizational design to accommodate the lack of supervisory staff in "The Vanishing Supervisor." Karen Youmans presents "An HIM Spin on the Revenue Cycle," which illustrates the complexities of managing decentralized processes.

Laura Lane Walls presents the advice of experienced HIM professionals in managing a remote work force in "Managing the Virtual HIM Department." And in "Assessing Privacy Risk in Outsourcing," attorney Margaret Davino draws on the UCSF story to offer recommendations for developing medical transcription outsourcing contracts. We'll continue to examine this issue; AHIMA has already issued a press release reiterating principles and practices of outsourcing and is preparing additional guidance materials.²

The New Knowledge Work for HIM

In a recent interview, management legend Peter Drucker speaks in favor of outsourcing for healthcare organizations, but not because it saves money. According to Drucker, "What outsourcing does is greatly improve the quality of the people who still work for you."³ This is a very provocative concept when we examine it in the context of HIM challenges today. Still, it is hard not to become defensive when we hear of American jobs being outsourced abroad.^{4,5}

Today, highly skilled HIM workers are challenged to improve productivity while also pressing to accelerate the pace of change. There is no shortage of work in HIM in the foreseeable future, though new technology and new processes will require new skills. This is exactly what AHIMA is focusing on with its work force development and e-HIM initiatives— helping the field transition to new and higher-level jobs as knowledge workers.

Notes

1. Lazarus, D. "A Tough Lesson on Medical Privacy: Pakistani Transcriber Threatens UCSF over Back Pay." *San Francisco Chronicle* (October 22, 2003).
2. "Globalization of Medical Transcription Industry Requires Proper Risk Analysis." AHIMA press release, October 30, 2003. Available at www.ahima.org/
3. Schlender, Brent. "Peter Drucker Sets Us Straight." *Fortune* (January 12, 2004): 117.

4. Fox, J. "Where Your Job Is Going." *Fortune* (November 24, 2003): 84–94.
5. Kripalani, M., and P. Engardio. "The Rise of India." *Business Week* (December 8, 2003): 66–78.

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Driving the Power of Knowledge

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