

# Member Advocates for PHRs, One Person at a Time

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*by Jewelle Hicks, publications manager*

As the manager of health information management for the NYU Clinical Cancer Center in New York, NY, Cindy M. Boester is accustomed to teamwork and problem solving. Boester, MS, RHIA, supervises a staff of 35 full-time employees at the outpatient facility, which has more than 600 visits a day.

A year and a half ago, the organization implemented a dictation system with front-end voice recognition, a major step toward an electronic health record, which NYU plans to roll out at the Cancer Center in the upcoming year.

## Exploring All HIM Avenues

Boester's career in HIM started when she accepted a part-time job as a file clerk after relocating to Denver, CO. "This job was my entry into the nitty-gritty of a medical record department because I was able to see what worked and what did not," she says. "I was intrigued by how medical data was analyzed and used to tell a story, so I decided to go back to school to get my HIM degree."

After graduation, Boester expanded her horizons through a series of nontraditional roles. She worked as a data collection coordinator on a RAND Corporation utilization study in Colorado, developed DRG systems for the Healthcare Association of New York State hospitals, and served as the associate executive director for Jacobi Medical Center in the Bronx.

At Jacobi, her division included risk management, quality improvement, and medical staff services. "I had access to several departments in order to do consummate quality improvement through data," she says.

## Answering the PHR Call

The 2001 Visionary Award winner got in on the ground floor of AHIMA's personal health record (PHR) initiative in 2004.

"I was chosen as one of three individuals from the state of New York to be trained in the personal health record. This was a natural initiative for AHIMA, and I considered it an honor and a privilege to be asked to give back to the association," she says.

Boester has been involved with AHIMA's PHR campaign since its inception as a community education coordinator, one of the members trained to build awareness on the local level by presenting and speaking in their communities. Boester estimates that she has presented to more than 500 people on the value of the PHR since 2004.

When asked about the future of PHRs, Boester says, "The future is very bright, but a national health information network is necessary to ensure a comprehensive PHR."

She is enthusiastic about playing a role in this future vision. "I hope to continue to educate as many people as possible on how to create a PHR," she says. "This is still a new topic, even for some in the healthcare field. And with the new myPHR.com Web site, AHIMA is poised to be the leading advocate in this area."

Boester notes that "everyone has a bad miscommunication story with a provider. Hopefully PHRs can help to change some of that." She advises her HIM colleagues to familiarize themselves with legislative issues surrounding the PHR and recommends that patients overcome their reluctance to ask providers for their medical records.

"The only way for people to be empowered," Boester says, "is to have all of the information. It is never too soon or too late to start a PHR."

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