

# Mixing Knowledge and Data Management: Using Health IT Skills to Leverage Technology

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*by Jewelle Hicks, publications manager*

As program director for revenue cycle information systems at Children's Hospital and Regional Medical Center in Seattle, WA, Patrick Dolan, RHIA, uses technology to help his organization utilize its resources more efficiently and better serve patients. His current objectives include seeking out next generation revenue cycle systems (including patient access, patient billing, scheduling, and accounting modules) and maintaining oversight of project managers who support current legacy systems in the revenue cycle area.

Dolan recently transferred into this role after serving three years as director of clinical information services, where he guided the organization's implementation of numerous products, including a computerized physician order entry system.

A facility serving four states (Washington, Alaska, Montana, and Idaho), Children's Hospital is committed to transitioning to an electronic health record (EHR). "We have a hybrid record at this point, which will become more electronic over time," Dolan says. "My group will craft the EHR via front-end data capture and finding ways to develop patient access systems. This will greatly augment the continued expansion of our patient care applications also under way by my clinical systems colleagues."

## Finding the Right Mix

Dolan was able to incorporate the right mix of skills and experience to position himself as a leader in the field of health IT. "As an undergraduate student I started out in clinical lab sciences. The medical records field looked appealing because it provided a nice mix of clinical knowledge and data management," he says. "Classes such as health information systems design and systems analysis were very interesting. I loved what computers could do, and there seemed like there was a significant void in our industry."

Dolan sees the combination of his HIM and IT experience as a great match. "There were always appealing components of both fields," he says. In addition, he saw an opportunity to "change what IT could do in order to streamline some pretty clunky medical records processes."

Dolan finds that his HIM and quality improvement background is a strong point in his current position. "My work in quality assurance and utilization management provided a better understanding of clinical operations. This insight into the content of the medical record is very beneficial," he says. "Now with electronic systems, there is the opportunity to move toward integrated patient care systems and a single source of knowledge."

## Speaking the Language

Many HIM professionals are unsettled by the jargon that comes along with many IT functions, and Dolan acknowledges that this jargon can be intimidating. "I had a great baseline knowledge to leverage because I had the user's perspective," Dolan says.

Training is essential for such a technical position. "I learned early on that you have to be able to speak the language. I was also blessed to work with programmers who were also great tutors. I learned a great deal on the job, but always augmented my skills with external education," Dolan says. "I took night classes in areas such as network technology and systems architecture and always tried to remain current with industry literature. I was also able to learn by 'osmosis' or by being in the environment, listening, and putting things into a framework."

Dolan is rewarded by seeing technical solutions improve processes. "Seeing technology work for providers and our patients gets me up in the morning."

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**Article citation:**

Hicks, Jewelle E. "Mixing Knowledge and Data Management: Using Health IT Skills to Leverage Technology" *Journal of AHIMA* 77, no.4 (April 2006): 91.

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