New e-HIM Initiative Will Reinvent HIM Practice, Support Infrastructure

Save to myBoK

by Jane Jeffries, MFA

Convention attendees received a powerful call to action in one of the Convention's general sessions, "E-HIM: The Imperative, The Opportunity." AHIMA Executive Vice President and CEO Linda Kloss, RHIA, CAE, explained the forces behind the healthcare industry's migration to an electronic environment and the responsibilities of HIM professionals. "Health information management professionals need to lead change in the transition to electronic health records and the national information infrastructure for healthcare," said Kloss. "We need to do it now, and we need to do it faster."

The Industry Mobilizes

Kloss revealed several drivers behind healthcare's mobilization, including an aging patient population, medical science and technological breakthroughs, the complexity of insurance and payments, and the effects of globalization and threat of bioterrorism. As a result, both public and private entities have sprung into action. Among the new initiatives that will forward the e-health goals are:

- The National Committee on Vital and Health Statistics' recent report on the national health information infrastructure. In support, AHIMA published a position statement. "We put our stake in the ground and said 'Here's how HIM is essential to a national health information infrastructure,'" said Kloss
- Federal agencies partnering to create standards that will make their systems interoperable
- The National Alliance for Health Information Technology (NAHIT), founded to improve healthcare quality through standards-based information systems (AHIMA is a member)
- The eHealth Initiative, a collaborative of federal, state, and local public health agencies, technology suppliers, providers, and healthcare organizations including AHIMA, focused on collecting and transmitting public health information

In short, these and other factors are reshaping the healthcare world. They are also presenting HIM professionals with an unprecedented and exciting opportunity: the chance to be change agents, according to Kloss. And to prepare its members for leadership roles, the Association is launching a new initiative: e-HIM, which stands for electronic health information management.

E-HIM, the Top Priority

The e-HIM initiative represents AHIMA's commitment to:

- reinvent professional practice, roles, and functions as the industry moves to electronic practice
- assert leadership and contribute to the development of the national healthcare information infrastructure
- deliver the cost and quality results that consumers and healthcare facilities need

The e-HIM initiative will ensure that the HIM profession leads the industry in moving healthcare to the information age.

To begin, AHIMA will convene a panel of industry experts to define a vision of the electronic health record (EHR) and HIM professionals' corresponding roles. Next, the Association will develop migration paths, based on benchmarking and best practices gleaned through work force research. An online curriculum to support e-HIM practice will follow, along with an EHR case book. Finally, the Association will introduce a major integrated communication plan to reach all members and increase the understanding and recognition of HIM professionals. "We don't want to be known as 'IT-challenged,'" warned Kloss.

Strategies Include Work Force, Education

In addition to the e-HIM initiative, AHIMA has three other strategic issues to address in 2003:

- HIA and HIT education
- HIM work force shortage
- Membership in AHIMA

Kloss noted that the decision to make coding, a strategic issue in 2002, an operational priority in 2003 reflects the Association's dedication to and investment in the field. Recent focus areas have included new entry-level certification, revitalizing local and state Coding Roundtables, new approval processes for coding education, and advocacy on national coding policy issues.

To be part of organizational planning for information and communication technology migration, Kloss advised attendees to demand a place at the table. "As a community of 43,000, we are so strong," she said. "We can move this forward at lightning speed."

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