

Passing Along the PHR Lesson: Educator Spreads the Word about Personal Health Records

Save to myBoK

by Anne Zender, MA, vice president of communications

From the classroom to the community, Ruth Walker, MIS, RHIA, CPHQ, is in the business of educating people. At work, she teaches HIM students and recruits new ones. And in her spare time, she helps her fellow HIM professionals take the personal health record (PHR) lesson to their communities.

In the Classroom and Beyond

Walker is a professional practice coordinator in the health information administration program in the School of Informatics at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. She teaches three classes per semester and works with students on arranging professional practice experiences and job placement. She recruits new students to the program and to the HIM profession, reaching out to college and high school students and attending job fairs.

Her biggest challenge, she says, is explaining the profession to students, teachers, and parents who may not know what it is. “People don’t know about the HIM profession—that there are people working to maintain medical information,” she says.

To get people interested, she tells them that HIM is “a combination of different professions—including medicine, law, business, finance, and technology,” she says. “There are a lot of career avenues, settings, and ways to work in this profession, from dealing with data analysis to registries, pharmaceuticals, research, quality improvement, to the revenue cycle and coding. And because it’s medical information, there are opportunities in privacy, security, and technology as well.”

Lifelong learning never stops, because “you never know what you may end up doing”

—Ruth Walker, Professional Practice Coordinator

School of Informatics, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis

A Change of Focus

Walker is well suited to teach this lesson. For many years she worked as an HIM director. During that time, she often served as a clinical instructor in hospitals. After a stint as an adjunct instructor, she decided three years ago to leave a position as HIM director at a large teaching hospital to teach full time.

Making the move from a busy teaching hospital to an academic environment was a big change, she says. “In acute care you’re juggling multiple balls, handling crises—it can be chaotic,” she says. “To go from that to a teaching setting was a big change.” But she enjoys getting students prepared to take on the challenges of HIM. “The philosophy in academics is very different,” she says. “There are a lot of diverse departments in the workplace, but in academics you’re just focusing on HIM. And you are teaching certain classes, so you become more specialized.”

The PHR Lesson

Walker is also an AHIMA volunteer. She is one of two community education coordinators for AHIMA’s PHR campaign in Indiana. She works with 27 state volunteers who have signed on to spread the word to consumers about keeping a PHR. These volunteers, Walker says, give local presentations at churches, hospital community groups, individual hospital departments, and even schools. There are coordinators and presenters in all 50 states.

Walker has long had an interest in the PHR. She started one for her father when he was diagnosed with cancer in the 1980s, then she started records for the rest of her family. Walker believes in the PHR because “it allows people to get all the

information to give to the provider so that they can have the complete picture,” she says. “It also helps an individual take responsibility for their care and become a more conscious, participative consumer. They’re paying attention to and recording their own health information.”

Article citation:

Zender, Anne. "Passing Along the PHR Lesson: Educator Spreads the Word about Personal Health Records" *Journal of AHIMA* 78, no.4 (April 2007): 100.

Driving the Power of Knowledge

Copyright 2022 by The American Health Information Management Association. All Rights Reserved.