

Preparing for HIM's Future Today

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by Jewelle Hicks, newsletter editor

“I knew that patients would need a record of their medical history. I knew that if stored correctly it could be made available to them easier.”

—Joyce Adkison, RHIA, director of medical records,
Haywood Regional Medical Center in Clyde, NC

Joyce Adkison, RHIA, has seen many changes since she began her career in HIM. After obtaining her first HIM-related job in the admitting and records office of a hospital in 1960, Adkison became the manager of the medical records department, then a coder, and coding supervisor. In her current position as director of medical records at Haywood Regional Medical Center in Clyde, NC, Adkison is responsible for all the records for the 200-bed facility.

Plans for the Future

Adkison's day-to-day responsibilities require a wide range of strengths and skill sets. By staying current on her computer skills and performance-improvement techniques, as well as honing her organizational and communication expertise, Adkison has been able to stay ahead of the curve.

“After I became a coding supervisor, I realized I had reached my professional peak unless I went back to school,” says Adkison. “I enrolled in the HIM program at Western Carolina University and went to school and worked full time. I got my degree in health information management, graduated magna cum laude, and became credentialed as an RHIA.”

In her more than 40 years in HIM, Adkison has witnessed quite a few advancements in technology. She recalls using manual and electric typewriters, then word processors, and finally computers. Adkison's facility is currently making the transition from paper to electronic medical records. “We are strategically planning and are currently projecting two to five years for a complete electronic record,” says Adkison. “Some portions of our records have already been implemented electronically and are actually accessible on computers as well as paper.”

In addition to her medical records responsibilities, she serves on a number of planning committees that help her facility conduct strategic planning for the next five to 10 years. To prepare for a Joint Commission survey later this year, Adkison serves on an internal task force, a HIPAA steering committee, and the information management team. Adkison takes all these responsibilities in stride by focusing on the end results.

“The most rewarding aspect of my job is when audits are completed and the numbers indicate excellent abilities,” says Adkison. “This gives employees incentive to continue to perform at a high level and assures me our patient records are accessible for patient care.”

A Turning Point in HIM

Adkison is optimistic about the future of HIM. “The medical record will always be instrumental for patient care at the institution it originated at as well as important for its research and statistical uses,” she says. “I see it eventually being available nationwide (if not worldwide) through privacy practices.”

She envisions the HIM director of the future as an individual who “develops systems that will involve other organizations in order to provide patients' medical information in a controlled and private setting.” As involvement with electronic medical records increases, Adkison sees the role filled by an individual with strong computer and management skills and a clear knowledge of HIM.

Adkison is excited about playing a part in the future of HIM. "I'm not willing to become stagnant," she says. "I'll never stop learning and getting excited about change."

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