Preparing for a New Generation of HIM

Save to myBoK

by Barbara Siegel, MS, RHIT

Earlier generations—our grandparents and parents—tell stories of how technology changed their lives. Born at the turn of the 20th century, my grandparents witnessed the successes of Alexander Graham Bell and the Wright brothers. My parents were mesmerized by talking movies and televisions in their living rooms. As a baby boomer, I watched NASA send John Glenn into space while my transistor radio made entertainment portable.

Today, the generations of the late 20th and early 21st centuries cannot imagine life without cell phones, MP3 players, and instant messaging. And the advances in medicine due to technology are staggering. With this amazing record of development, the reality of electronic health information certainly seems doable.

Our Best Foot Forward

AHIMA representatives are providing expertise to the steering and working groups of the Connecting for Health project funded by the Markle Foundation, a non-profit group that works to accelerate the use of information technology (IT) to address critical public needs in public policy and healthcare.

The Association is also a founding member of the National Alliance for Health Information Technology, which aims to advance the use of common standards in health IT. The imperatives for healthcare organizations to implement the electronic health record (EHR) go beyond healthcare organizations, as evidenced by the efforts of The Leapfrog Group, a coalition of Fortune 500 companies. As purchasers of healthcare for their employees, this coalition is "grading" providers based on outcomes. Outcomes will improve through the use of electronic standards and electronic documentation. And improved outcomes equal reduced costs to healthcare services purchasers.

E-HIM: A Strategic Imperative

For AHIMA, e-HIM is a major strategic focus for the next several years. The goal of e-HIM is to advance the full implementation of an EHR while reinventing HIM roles. As most health information is collected for the purpose of direct patient care, the initial focus is on the EHR. However, the vision for e-HIM goes beyond managing an institution's EHR system to fostering an electronic infrastructure to connect our healthcare system and allow patients access to their personal information.

As traditional paper-based practice moves to electronic and Web-based environments, AHIMA strategies are designed to help members make the transition to an electronic practice environment and help HIM demonstrate its unique ability to make this environment work the way it is envisioned.

Steps Toward Action

In 2003, AHIMA will convene an expert panel of vendor and industry experts to articulate the vision of a fully integrated EHR, outline the roles HIM professionals will play, and discuss the plan for moving medical record functions to this new electronic environment. Next, a road map will be developed by advancing best practices, benchmarking, and seeding new best practice initiatives. Results of the work force study will help to forecast future industry demands and identify skills required for the transition.

AHIMA will also make recommendations for standards development on issues such as electronic signature, patient identification, and autocoding. Updated curriculum models will reflect the education and skills required to perform HIM roles in an e-HIM environment. Look for online tools and other continuing education opportunities including change management and leadership skills development.

In this next generation of HIM practice, every HIM professional must participate actively in the movement to the e-HIM environment. You are called to take action: tell the story of the practice-changing technology of your time.

Barbara Siegel *(bsiegel@humed.com) is director of health information at Hackensack University Medical Center in Hackensack, NJ.*

Article citation:
Siegel, Barbara. "Preparing for a New Generation of HIM." *Journal of AHIMA* 74, no.3 (2003): 8.

Driving the Power of Knowledge