

Privacy and Information Governance—HIM's "Semper Fi"

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As a core value of the United States Marine Corps, *Semper Fidelis*, or "Semper Fi," represents a non-negotiable code to be "always faithful." The motto serves as a reminder to be faithful to the mission, to each other, and to the country.

Privacy and security is not a new concept for health information management (HIM) professionals—who have a long history of providing patient access and protecting personal health information. As health informatics and information management professionals, I believe our duty to protect the consumer is an absolute to which we are always accountable—it is our "Semper Fi." This maxim remains a guide for HIM professionals, even as legislation and evolving technology introduce changes to the industry landscape.

In 2009 President Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). Title XIII of ARRA, the Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health (HITECH) Act, authorized an unprecedented investment to support the widespread adoption of health information technology. With public trust and acceptance of health IT hanging in the balance, the US Congress made substantial changes to the privacy and security provisions in the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) to support both continuing and emerging health IT initiatives. The revisions come with improvements to the privacy law, but at a price for violators as HIPAA promises to enforce additional audits and hefty fines.

Health informatics and information management professionals are instrumental in providing adequate safeguards to protect personal health information. But HIM practice goes far beyond legislation, high-stakes accountability, or the basic policy and operational tenets of privacy and security. While personal health information must be protected, it must also be readily available for use where and when it's needed. As practitioners, we must ensure the quality and integrity of the data. It's important to find the right balance between information transparency and guarding information as an asset. AHIMA has adopted the Gartner definition of information governance—it's one you may find useful within your own organization. Information governance specifies the decision rights and provides a framework to ensure appropriate behavior in the valuation, creation, storage, use, archiving, and delivery of information. It entails processes, roles, policies, standards, and metrics to ensure the effective use of information.

Information governance puts tools into place to manage information across the enterprise, assess and mitigate risks, and understand gaps. A strong commitment to information governance helps ensure you are "always faithful" to the HIM professional's commitment to maintain quality information for consumers.

So is privacy and security and information governance your Semper Fi? The healthcare ecosystem is changing. Value-based models of healthcare require better data. Consumer demand for personal information is on the rise and stringent privacy regulations have created a "tight rope" for organizations to cross. The time for information governance is now.

How will you balance transparency and information as an asset? Don't hesitate to become an information governance catalyst for your organization and, as always, Dream Big, Believe, and Lead.

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