

Putting the HIM Stamp on RHIOs

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by Meg Featheringham, assistant editor

LaVonne LaMoureaux, RHIA, CAE, is learning firsthand about the intricacies of health information exchange and regional health information organizations (RHIOs). For the past two years, LaMoureaux has volunteered with California's RHIO (CalRHIO), an independent organization that is bringing together health plans, providers, hospitals, consumers, public agencies, researchers, policy leaders, and others around the shared vision of using IT to make healthcare safer and more efficient throughout California.

In 2005, when CalRHIO was just being launched, the organization realized that a key participant was missing from the table: HIM. "Those in the work groups at the time immediately noticed that they didn't have any HIM professionals on board yet," she says. A series of phone calls later, LaMoureaux was immersed in the world of data exchange. "That was a very interesting time for me because RHIOs were new. We were just getting started," she says.

She first was appointed to CalRHIO's clinical work group, which made recommendations on patient identity and the clinical information data set. Since then, she's worked on various other work groups, participating in conference calls and learning the ins and outs of health information exchange.

HIM Key to RHIO Discussions

LaMoureaux admits that she was on a huge learning curve when she first began volunteering for CalRHIO. "It was labor intensive in that there was a lot to read and a lot to consider," she says. However, she wasn't alone in her lack of knowledge about data exchange. "There were people with different levels of knowledge of information technology," she says.

She also found that she didn't need to know everything about RHIOs and data exchange. "It's not necessary to know the entire playing field in order to participate," she says. "Health information professionals have a set of knowledge that is significantly important and critical to the decision-making processes that are being made within RHIOs, EHRs, and data exchange." LaMoureaux finds HIM professionals are needed at RHIO discussions because they understand how and why health information is used and collected.

Professionally and Personally Rewarding

LaMoureaux takes a great deal of pride in her work with CalRHIO. "It was interesting sitting at various tables within CalRHIO and looking around the table and seeing healthcare providers who are competitors collaborate in this effort to build this infrastructure and the capabilities that are necessary for a secure statewide health information exchange system," she says. "They are committed to the secure exchange of information and investment of information technology."

LaMoureaux urges other HIM professionals to raise their hands and get involved in RHIOs in their area. "They need to get involved in their alliance organizations within their state, find out which RHIOs within their state community or region are developing, and then participate, period," she says.

HIM professionals should keep up-to-date with the latest developments in IT and health information exchange. LaMoureaux has kept abreast of the latest RHIO developments through AHIMA's RHIO Community of Practice and FORE Library: HIM Body of Knowledge, as well as networking with colleagues. "You really have to seek the information out and work at it and take from it what you need for whatever activity that you're working on," she says.

She finds the experience of getting involved with a RHIO professionally and personally satisfying. "The experience, throughout, while it has been time-consuming and has taken a lot of extra effort to participate, it has been both professionally and personally rewarding," she says.

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