

Quality Leader

Save to myBoK

by Jewelle Hicks, newsletter editor

Quality is defined as a degree of excellence. When the term quality management is applied to HIM, the definition expands to include the consistent and methodical improvement of data quality. As the director of quality management at Wilson Memorial Hospital in Sidney, OH, Elizabeth Custis, RHIT, CPHQ, has been exemplifying a degree of excellence throughout her 34-year career.

Custis started in HIM in 1969 as a medical transcriptionist and was encouraged by her mentor to take the ART (Accredited Record Technician, now RHIT) exam. “She was a wonderful coach who taught me a lot about medical record science,” reflects Custis. “Certainly without her support and motivation, I would not be where I am today.”

In 1986, Wilson Memorial decided to separate quality management and medical records, which had previously been one department, into two departments. After holding the position of director of medical records at Wilson Memorial for 11 years, Custis accepted a position as quality management director with responsibility for infection control, social services, and utilization review. She has no regrets about her altered career path because “it introduced me to many other healthcare areas that I would not have learned about had I stayed in the medical record department.”

Accepting the Challenge

After assuming the role of quality management director, Custis moved on to become a senior manager and ultimately stepped into her current position as part of the administrative team. She plays many roles in the 112-bed facility, including providing direction, leadership, and coordination in all areas involving quality and risk management. In addition, she is responsible for several departments, including infection control, education, medical staff services, patient advocacy, and safety.

Some of Custis’ ongoing projects as the director of quality management include coordinating the facility’s Joint Commission survey, acting as systems manager for Wilson Memorial’s internal quality and risk tracking system, facilitating a continuous quality improvement team, and developing a reporting mechanism to obtain timely physician reports about practice patterns.

Pulling It All Together

With 10 staff members reporting directly or indirectly to her, how does Custis maintain focus on her ever-demanding position? She admits it can be a challenge, but she keeps up to date by staying active in associations such as AHIMA and reading journals for information on the latest issues.

Custis finds many aspects of her job rewarding—and it’s certainly never boring. “There is always something different and challenging,” says Custis. She also enjoys the team atmosphere of working with groups such as continuous quality improvement teams. “When you form a team to improve a process with several different departments involved, and the team goes through the process step by step, it is great to see the team as it develops and works together to improve that process,” she says.

Next Steps

Custis sees a bright future for quality management professionals. Joint Commission core measures, patient satisfaction data, and patient safety are all key issues that will place more emphasis on quality management. According to Custis, “Diversity is what is so great about the health information field, as well as the fact that there are always opportunities available in one form or another. Not only in hospitals, but in nursing homes, insurance companies, managed care companies, and physician offices.”

“Improving processes is what it is all about--for the patients, the physicians, and other departments.”

—Elizabeth Custis, RHIT, CPHQ,
Director of Quality Management at
Wilson Memorial Hospital in Sidney, OH

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Driving the Power of Knowledge

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