

RHIA Reality Check: RHIAs Rate 195 Tasks and 90 Knowledge Areas in Job Analysis Survey

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by Rita Bowen, MA, RHIA, CHPS

Change is occurring quickly in HIM, and keeping measure of what it takes—and will take—to do the job is more important than ever. AHIMA surveyed more than 3,200 registered health information administrators (RHIAs) in 2004 to analyze the tasks they perform and the knowledge they need to adequately perform those tasks.

AHIMA will use the results to develop new versions of the RHIA certification examination, guide professional development needs such as core and continuing education, and anticipate expected changes in the RHIA job role over the coming years.

Going to the Source

Appropriately, the survey of RHIAs was developed by RHIAs. Members of an AHIMA committee began the process by reviewing and revising existing background information on RHIA job tasks and knowledge areas. Based on this information, they formulated a job analysis survey that included 195 tasks and 90 knowledge statements covering the following domains:

Tasks

- Health data management
- Health statistics, biomedical research, and quality management
- Health services organization and delivery
- Information technology and systems
- Organization and management

Knowledge

- Biomedical sciences
- Health data management
- Health statistics, biomedical research, and quality management
- Health services organization and delivery
- Information technology and systems
- Organization and management

A total of 3,246 RHIAs participated in the survey, a response rate of 33 percent. The majority of respondents earned their RHIA between 1980 and 2004. Nearly one in five was previously credentialed as a registered health information technician (RHIT). All regions of the US were represented in the survey. RHIAs who work in international locations, including Canada, Germany, Hong Kong, Japan, Saudi Arabia, and Taiwan, also took part in the survey.

Participants rated each task and knowledge area in relation to its importance in their current positions. Ratings were made along a five-point continuum ranging from “of no importance” to “very important.” Participants also had the opportunity to suggest professional development opportunities that would improve their performance as RHIAs and comment on how they expect the RHIA role will change in the coming years.

The Certification Passport

RHIAs come from diverse backgrounds and are employed in diverse settings. These factors present many opportunities for RHIAs and help them serve as valuable resources in HIM’s transformation to digital practice. Yet the wide range also dilutes

their identity, making it harder for others in healthcare to know exactly what an RHIA can do. Revamping the certification examination is critical to RHIA's ability to demonstrate who they are and how they can contribute to the successful migration to e-HIMTM.

Because the RHIA credential applies to a wide range of work settings, the certification examination will continue to include broad knowledge coverage. When asked to prioritize the content areas of the RHIA exam, survey respondents recommended that the greatest share of questions be assigned to organization and management, health data management, and information technology and systems. The survey makes clear the importance of expanding IT knowledge.

Top Work Settings	
Hospitals remain dominant, but RHIAs work in many different settings.	
Hospital	44%
Consultant or vendor of HIM services	10%
Multihospital or diversified system	7%
Medical group practice or physician office	5%
Educational institution	5%

Top Job Titles	
RHIAs apply their skills across a wide variety of duties.	
Health information services manager (director, assistant director, supervisor)	14%
Data translator	14%
Coder	8%
Consultant	7%
Manager	5%

Educational Attainment	
Nearly one in four RHIAs holds a master's degree.	
Baccalaureate degree	76%
Master's degree	22%

Top Knowledge Areas	
Respondents recommended that three of the six knowledge areas comprise more than half of questions on the certification exam.	
Organization and management	20%
Health data management	20%
Information technology and systems	19%

Keeping Education Current

RHIAs will require skills to assist with the integration of diverse clinical data sources within an electronic health record platform. Increasing adoption of digital records will also bring in its wake issues surrounding the legal health record. Emerging technology will create new roles in areas such as patient advocacy, data management, information integrity, system functionality, and data standardization.

The transition to e-HIM will thus provide many opportunities for RHIA's, provided they obtain the skills necessary to compete in the electronic environment. As a profession, it is vital to rethink educational efforts to ensure that the work force of tomorrow is ready to accept these opportunities.

It is equally important that seasoned RHIA's ensure their skill sets meet these opportunities and challenges. RHIA's will require continuing education opportunities to help them survive and thrive in the electronic environment. Data from the job analysis will help AHIMA revise its continuing education initiatives accordingly.

AHIMA is also in the process of conducting job analyses for both the RHIT and the CCA certifications, anticipating new exam blueprints and competency statements to be incorporated in test specifications in 2006.

What's an RHIA?

RHIA's are skilled in the collection, interpretation, and analysis of patient data. Additionally, they receive the training necessary to assume managerial positions related to these functions. RHIA's interact with all levels of an organization—clinical, financial, and administrative—that employ patient data in decision making and in everyday operations.

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Article citation:

Bowen, Rita. "RHIA Reality Check: RHIA's Rate 195 Tasks and 90 Knowledge Areas in Job Analysis Survey." *Journal of AHIMA* 76, no.6 (June 2005): 44-45.

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