

Ready for the EHR?: a New Survey Measures EHR Implementation and Individual Readiness

Save to myBoK

by Anne Zender, MA

The electronic health record (EHR) is making inroads in healthcare organizations, and many HIM professionals say they are ready. More than 40 percent of respondents to a new survey indicate that their organizations are extensively or partially implementing an EHR, and almost 70 percent say they personally have medium to high levels of readiness for the deployment of EHRs.

The survey was conducted by *Healthcare Informatics* in collaboration with AHIMA at AHIMA's National Convention in October 2004. It was designed to benchmark the level of readiness of HIM professionals to contribute to e-HIM™ and to gauge the extent of EHR implementation in their organizations.

Moving toward the Vision

The 2003 AHIMA report "A Vision of the e-HIM Future" identified the future state of health information as "electronic, consumer-centered, comprehensive, longitudinal, accessible, and credible."¹ The report also noted that the evolution of the EHR continues to move the industry forward.² The results of the 2004 survey show that the industry is making progress.

When asked to describe their organizations' progress toward an EHR, 17 percent of respondents report extensive implementation and 26 percent indicate partial implementation. Another 21 percent say their organizations are gathering information about implementation.

Of respondents whose organizations have not begun implementation, 15 percent expect they will begin in the next six months, and 26 percent think they will begin within the next year. A similarly sized group sees the EHR in the long-term future: 22 percent expect to begin within the next two years, and 20 percent say they will begin in three years or longer. Only 10 percent of respondents said their organizations have no foreseeable plans.

About the Survey

The survey received a total of 284 responses. Nearly 80 percent of respondents worked in clinical settings, with 55 percent working in hospitals and smaller percentages working in ambulatory care, long-term care, behavioral health, and other settings. Of the respondents in nonclinical settings, the biggest group (7 percent) worked in consultancies; smaller percentages worked in administrative sites, HIM specialty settings, or academic institutions.

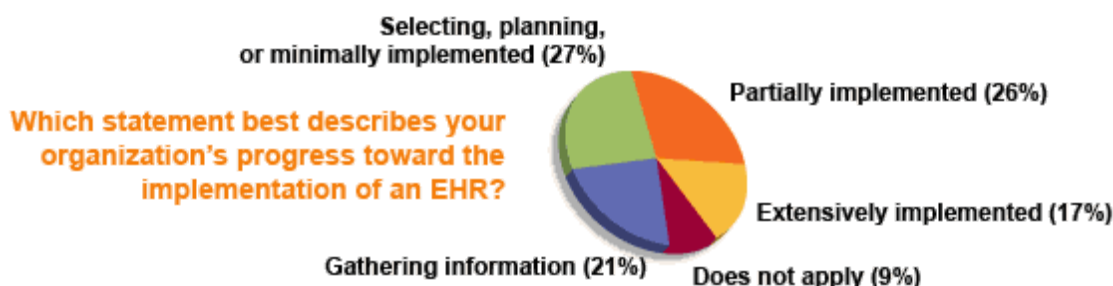
Among all respondents, 83 percent identified themselves as HIM professionals; "director" and "manager" were the most frequently identified titles. Another 5 percent identified themselves as information technology or information systems professionals, and 4 percent identified themselves as general and financial managers.

The survey was sponsored by McKesson and EMC. The 2003 e-HIM report was supported by a grant to FORE from Siemens Medical Solutions, USA; the HIM work force study was supported by grants to FORE from 3M Health Information Systems and MedQuist, Inc., and gifts from state associations and members.

How Ready Are You?

While facilities proceed with EHR plans, HIM professionals are preparing themselves. Nearly 70 percent of respondents indicate that they have medium to high personal levels of readiness for the EHR.

Respondents were asked to rate their personal readiness on a scale from 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest. Twenty percent of respondents ranked their readiness at 5, the highest level, 23 percent ranked their readiness at 4, and 26 percent ranked their readiness at 3. The remaining respondents ranked themselves at the lower end of the scale.



Those who described their preparedness as low to medium were asked to identify the skills they need to become more prepared. Process reengineering, database technologies, and project management skills were the top skills identified.



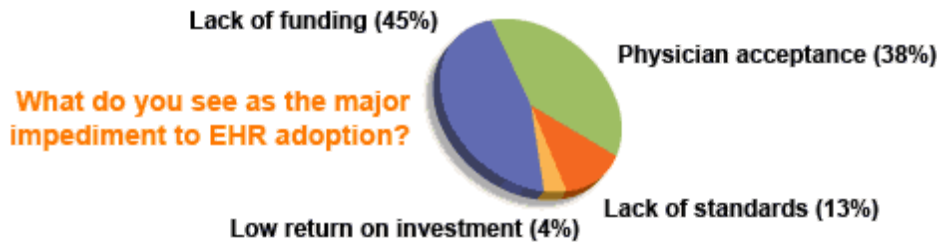
What It Takes to Get It Done

Because health information is increasingly used for multiple purposes, AHIMA's 2003 e-HIM report notes that the future depends not just on technology but on the wise management of data, also. To move toward e-HIM, organizations will need to coordinate a number of applications that use health data. In terms of EHR implementation, what needs to be done first? And what barriers need to be overcome? The survey gives us some idea.

Respondents were asked to prioritize the sequence in which clinical IT applications should be introduced to build an effective EHR. They ranked the applications in the following order (the first being most important):

1. Clinical support systems
2. Clinical documentation
3. Clinical data repository
4. Electronic health record
5. Clinical decision support, computerized physician order entry
6. Physician portal
7. RIS, PACS

The survey also asked respondents what they perceive as the major impediment to EHR adoption. Lack of funding tops the list (45 percent), followed by physician acceptance (38 percent). This finding supports other recent industry reports that identify cost and physician acceptance as EHR barriers.^{3,4}

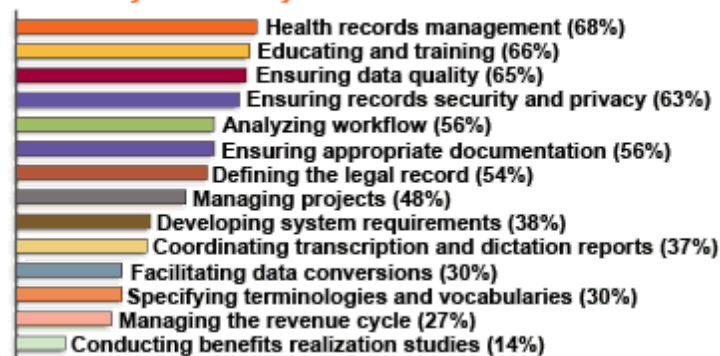


New Roles, New Challenges

AHIMA work force data show that today's HIM professionals are already working in increasingly diverse roles and settings. The 2003 e-HIM report identifies a number of roles HIM professionals are likely to fill in the future, and it notes that they will "increasingly function as conduits of health information and will interpret how data will be used."⁵ As HIM professionals learn more about e-HIM, they understand that working in an EHR environment will create new opportunities.

Some new opportunities are beginning to appear. In identifying what they see as their roles in the EHR environment, respondents rank traditional functions such as health records management and education and training at the top, but other functions, such as ensuring data quality and defining the legal record, were also frequently identified.

What do you see as your role in the EHR environment?



As the industry continues to focus attention on the EHR, HIM professionals are in a good position to educate their organizations on the benefits of e-HIM and to expand their practice to take on new roles and functions. As the survey demonstrates, that progress has already begun.

Notes

1. AHIMA. "A Vision of the e-HIM Future." 2003. Available online at www.ahima.org.
2. Ibid.
3. Capgemini. "What Are Health Organizations Thinking about Electronic Health Records?" 2004. Available online at www.capgemini.com.
4. Audet, Anne-Marie, et. al. "Information Technologies: When Will They Make It into Physicians' Black Bags?" *Medscape General Medicine* 6, no. 4 (2004). Available online at www.medscape.com.
5. AHIMA. "Data for Decisions: The HIM Work Force and Workplace Survey." 2003. Available online at www.ahima.org.

Anne Zender (anne.zender@ahima.org) is vice president of communications at AHIMA.

Article citation:

Zender, Anne. "Ready for the EHR? A New Survey Measures EHR Implementation and Individual Readiness." *Journal of AHIMA* 76, no.3 (March 2005): 54-55.

Driving the Power of Knowledge

Copyright 2022 by The American Health Information Management Association. All Rights Reserved.