

Right Information at the Right Time : Improving the Quality of Health Information Improves Quality of Care

Save to myBoK

by **Vera Rulon**, MS, RHIT, CCS, FAHIMA

Physician practices face many challenges, especially in the areas of HIM. In particular, they have key concerns in successfully implementing electronic health records. These issues include empowering patients, gathering information that supports sound clinical decision making, navigating reimbursement systems, and reducing medical errors.

The PHR's Importance

When my mother was diagnosed with a serious illness, the number of doctors she needed to see increased, as did the number of medications she was prescribed. For each appointment she stuffed all her prescription bottles in a plastic bag and then into her purse so that she could tell each physician which medications she was taking.

In addition, each new physician or specialist required a reiteration of her medical history. She found it difficult to relive every treatment over and over.

Clinical decision making is the crux of a physician's work. Having the right information at the right time is paramount in helping patients make the best decisions in their medical care.

To facilitate patient communication that is open and trusting, clinicians can offer a patient-centered record, one that does not require patients to restate their medical histories. This includes offering or accommodating patients' personal health records.

HIM professionals can help patients compile their information to share with providers. AHIMA offers multiple tools to help with this process, including the newly relaunched Web site www.myPHR.com, a resource of PHR materials.

HIM Best Practices

Access to evidence-based research and best practices is also important for outlining all potential treatment options. Good health information improves the patient experience, demonstrates the physician's knowledge, and supports the delivery of quality healthcare.

The AHIMA Foundation is working toward an institute that will provide research in the areas of HIM best practices. This research will facilitate improvement not only in how we manage health information, but in the health industry overall.

Physician practices have other information management concerns, including navigating the various reimbursement mechanisms. Payers tend to create their own payment policies, and with multiple payers there is a lot to navigate.

Healthcare reimbursement relies on the information gathered during a visit or episode of care. Therefore physician practices must ensure that their information is timely and accurate.

The EHR's Impact on Quality Care

Currently the federal government is finalizing its incentive plan to promote EHR adoption, a provision of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. As this program defines the "meaningful use" of EHRs, it is important to keep focused on the central goal of health IT. The most important benefit of implementing an EHR in physician practices is help improving the quality of care.

Physicians are human, and alerts and reminders can help improve clinical practice and reduce medical errors. With good health information available, health IT systems offer many possibilities, such as an alert of an allergy or potential drug interaction.

The value of the electronic health record is clear: it gets us closer to “quality healthcare through quality information.” HIM professionals play a key role in this journey.

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