

Secret HIM Recipe for Sharing Healthcare Data

[Save to myBoK](#)

By Rita A. Scichilone, MHSA, RHIA, CCS, CCS-P

When preparing a meal to share with others, the best cooks pay attention to which ingredients baked into the final product can determine the success or failure of the meal. This process is surprisingly similar to HIM professionals sharing health data with others. The way information is prepared and shared with others is profoundly different today than it was just a few years ago. In today's healthcare environment, a variety of ingredients are required to safeguard health information and its data integrity during the exchange of content between people and organizations.

The "meaningful use" of health information, as stated in the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services EHR Incentive Program, requires the application of selected principles along with the integration of standards. Care providers generating and sending data about patients may or may not be understood correctly by the other care providers receiving the information. This depends on whether both health information management principles and standards are effectively "baked" into the individual exchange partner's processes. This is a foundational patient safety issue that requires the attention of today's HIM professionals.

HIM Principle Ingredients

Technology solutions are adding substance and spice, but new informatics tools are only part of the recipe. No matter the solution, a healthy dash of HIM principles is required as well in order to optimally achieve the goal of semantic interoperability. An examination of the current industry environment shows that a holistic approach to data collection would sweeten the pot. Leadership providing data governance across the healthcare enterprise adds best practices and integrity assurance for serving up trustworthy information.

Main Ingredient-Data Management

Because data is the life force for any healthcare entity, it must be managed to avoid unnecessary or redundant collection. When possible, it should be captured once and used many times; data from a single capture can be leveraged by care providers for different needs in both internal and external information sharing. This approach saves money, reduces data integrity problems in reporting, and minimizes medical errors when information is shared as the basis for care.

The following principles for health information management apply to everyone who has access to personal healthcare records or data sets used for healthcare purposes.^{[1,2](#)}

1. Defend the right of individuals to have access to their health information
2. Protect the content of personal information from unauthorized access
3. Secure complete and accurate personal healthcare information for when and where it is needed for patient care
4. Strive for health information integrity from the point of creation through the stages of use and transmission
5. Adopt the uniform use of standard international terminologies and classification systems that capture, represent, and communicate knowledge
6. Strive for completeness of documentation, capture, storage, and use when sharing with others to ensure data integrity
7. Use systems that allow data to be collected once and used many times (where feasible)
8. Promote uniform laws, regulations, and standards related to health records and information exchange systems
9. Provide accurate and reliable reports to external agencies and business associates
10. Promote and defend HIM principles and the appropriate use of health information
11. Prohibit and eliminate the use of health information for discrimination
12. Prohibit and eliminate misuse of health information, whether intentional or unintentional
13. Provide legal consent for the release of health information

14. Support prosecution and penalties for misusing an individual's health information
15. Advocate for and support nationwide uniform laws and regulations concerning confidentiality, privacy, and security of health information
16. Create policies that promote transparency in the collection, storage, and use of health records

Mix Principles with Advanced Technology

Data stewardship is a key factor when integrating these principles into policy. Adoption is needed to achieve patient-centered services and responsible management of health-related information. Government agencies and standards development organizations have a special responsibility to promote and use HIM principles as the industry creates health information exchanges (HIEs) and launches harmonization projects aimed at achieving system-wide data sharing interoperability.

Although electronic health records are a targeted use of HIM principles and data stewardship awareness, there are significant information-related tasks and systems that must be managed outside the boundary of health records. One important example is early patient identification, which ensures that information is linked to the correct patient. In addition, the transport of information in organized programs such as established HIE entities, the Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT's Direct Project, and other types of technology "gateways" are also in need of HIM guiding principles. It is important to be mindful of additional materials that are frequently added to the EHR from sources outside the health record that include personally identifiable content.

Since health information exchange is emerging rapidly as a next generation feature of health services, it is critical that when any process is developed it includes the below requirements:³

- Determine and define exactly what data is stored by the HIE entity
- Define what personal health information included in the content will not be shared and what content requires special protection under applicable laws for the location
- Develop and enforce privacy and security policy requirements
- Determine how patient records are linked when more than one provider is sharing an individual's content
- Demand data ownership and stewardship requirements and policies be in place and understood by all parties involved in the data sharing
- Determine the protocol for action when any kind of data breach occurs

Serve with Pride

Taking these steps makes the exchange safer and more reliable than just depending on the technical specifications alone. When managing and exchanging data for patient care requirements, make sure to use all of these extra ingredients in the process. This will ensure an HIM professional gets the best results every time, and can serve the patient with pride.

Notes

1. AHIMA. "American Health Information Management Association Code of Ethics." 2011.
2. AHIMA. "Ethical Standards for Clinical Documentation Improvement Professionals." 2010.
3. AHIMA. "HIM Principles in Health Information Exchange." *Journal of AHIMA* 78, no. 8 (September 2007).

Rita Scichilone (rita.scichilone@ahima.org) is senior advisor, global standards at AHIMA.

Article citation:

Scichilone, Rita A. "Secret HIM Recipe for Sharing Healthcare Data" *Journal of AHIMA* 83, no.10 (October 2012): 60-61.

Driving the Power of Knowledge

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