

Setting the Norm: HIM Increasingly Involved in Developing and Using Standards

Save to myBoK

By Kim Osborne, RHIA, PMP; Lisa Spellman, MA, CPHIMS; and Diana Warner, MS, RHIA, CHPS, FAHIMA

Healthcare organizations today are using a variety of information systems. In the past, it was enough to have stand-alone systems to meet the business and clinical needs of an organization. In today's increasingly complex and interconnected world, however, standardization of information and systems is needed to provide a common set of requirements that enable interoperability within and between these systems. Adoption of relevant standards is used to achieve this common set of requirements and is increasingly important in the certification, implementation, and interoperability of healthcare software. Standards play a key role in healthcare's ability to provide high quality, patient-centered care.

Standards Set the Rules

Standards take the form of "official" specifications developed in a formal, prescribed, and rigid process by accredited standards development organizations (SDOs) like the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and Health Level Seven (HL7). ISO's definition of a standard is "a document that provides requirements, specifications, guidelines or characteristics that can be used consistently to ensure that materials, products, processes, and services are fit for their purpose." The *Merriam-Webster Medical Dictionary* defines a standard as "something set up or established by an authority as a rule for the measure of quantity, weight, extent, value, or quality." And the Oxford dictionary defines a standard as "a level of quality or attainment; or an idea or thing used as a measure, norm, or model in comparative evaluations."

Standards can be adopted voluntarily or incorporated into federal laws and regulations in a process known as incorporation by reference (IBR). The US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is increasingly relying on IBR in the certification criteria for electronic health records (EHRs). Outside of the US, adoption of standards is often mandated by government policy, particularly in those nations with forms of government-provided healthcare.

HHS's Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT (ONC) also has several activities to initiate and adopt standards. These include:

- Health Information Technology Policy Committee (HITPC), which makes recommendations for a policy framework for a nationwide health information infrastructure, including standards for electronic exchange of health information
- Health Information Technology Standards Committee (HITPS), which makes recommendations for standards, implementation specifications, and certification criterion for the electronic exchange of health information
- Standards & Interoperability (S&I) Framework, which was created to enable harmonized interoperability specifications to support national healthcare outcomes and healthcare priorities such as the "meaningful use" EHR Incentive Program

Standard Types Important to HIM

There are many types of standards critical to health information professionals today. These standards include semantic standards that preserve the meaning of data as it travels within and between systems, and process standards that define how data should be used. Technical standards and technical specifications are used to support interoperability, and transport standards enable reliable information sharing. There are also standards designed to preserve the privacy and security of individuals and organizations. In addition, standards are used to recommend frameworks and models of information sharing and data management.

In healthcare, examples of standards at work include the use of a standardized instrument to monitor blood pressure, and the use of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) code set for reporting and indexing patient diagnoses. National standards such as the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) apply to health information transactions in

the United States. In addition, there is the urgent need globally for standards involving or affecting health information. Important goals include enabling reliable health information exchange, studying and improving population health, and increasing potential for swifter time-to-market for new medicines and care protocols.

Standards Work Involving HIM Professionals

SDO	Standard
Terminology and Classification Standards	
American Medical Association	Current Procedural Terminology (CPT)
World Health Organization (WHO) Collaborating Center for the Classification of Diseases for North America National Center for Health Statistics/Centers for Disease Control and Prevention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ICD-10-CM • ICD-10-PCS • ICD-11
International Health Terminology Standards Development Organization (IHTSDO)	Systematized Nomenclature of Medicine – Clinical Terms (SNOMED-CT)
Health Informatics Standards	
International Organization for Standardization (ISO) - Technical Committee 215 (ISO/TC215) on Health Informatics and US Technical Advisory Group (US TAG) to ISO/TC215	ISO 17090-1, Health informatics, Public key infrastructure, Part 1: Overview of digital certificate services
Electronic Health Records and Interoperability Standards	
Health Level Seven (HL7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HL7/ISO 10781 Electronic Health Record Functional Model (EHR-FM)—a joint project between HL7 and ISO • EHR Records Management and Evidentiary Support Functional Profile (RM-ES FP) • Privacy & Security of Mobile Devices (mHealth) • Continuity of Care Document Architecture (CDA) and Consolidated CDA (C-CDA)

HIM Professionals Get Involved with SDOs

Health information management (HIM) professionals are actively participating in key SDOs across the globe to influence and lead standards development activities. Health informatics standards, best practices, and regulations are required to manage electronic health data and support the foundation of HIM principles. HIM professionals' expertise in privacy and security, patient data, business processes, messaging, interoperability, and regulations are valuable resources to healthcare organizations. This same expertise is transferable to developing the standards needed to support foundational HIM principles.

The standards development activities listed in the above table are just some of the areas where AHIMA members, staff, and HIM professionals are contributing to this important work.

More HIM Professionals Needed for Standards Work

HIM professionals are needed at all levels of standards development. Participating in the activities at the grassroots level is needed to ensure record integrity and HIM principles are placed at the forefront of any new standards.

All HIM professionals are encouraged to be aware of and involved with standards development and advancement to advocate for the profession. This will ensure integrity and reliability for HIM-centric issues in an electronic environment. Visit www.ahima.org/about/global for more information.

Kim Osborne (kim.osborne@ahima.org) is standards manager, public policy, at AHIMA. Lisa Spellman (lisa.spellman@ahima.org) is the secretary for ISO/TC 215 Health Informatics and administrator of US TAG for ISO/TC 215 Health Informatics. Diana Warner (diana.warner@ahima.org) is a director of HIM practice excellence at AHIMA.

Article citation:

Osborne, Kim; Spellman, Lisa; Warner, Diana. "Setting the Norm: HIM Increasingly Involved in Developing and Using Standards" *Journal of AHIMA* 85, no.6 (June 2014): 52-53.

Driving the Power of Knowledge

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