

Snap Judgment

Save to myBoK

By AHIMA Professional Ethics Committee

Anyone who is a member of AHIMA or holds its credentials agrees to abide by its [code of ethics](#).

The code sets forth professional values and ethical principles, and it offers guidelines to which professionals aspire. “Ethical behaviors result from a personal commitment to engage in ethical practice,” it notes.

A code of ethics also offers a guide by which individual decisions and actions can be judged.

A case in point is the scenario below, written by AHIMA’s Professional Ethics Committee. Is there a concern with the actions described, and if so, what would be an appropriate response?

Scenario

A 20-year veteran of the HIM department started her career as a night-shift file clerk when an innovative tertiary care center built a sister facility in her community. She has been a long-time fan of her facility, and her friends and family have heard remarkable stories about her experiences, promotions within the department, and even some notable patients. She has now been promoted to supervisor over EHR coordinators and is clearly proud of this accomplishment.

During a lunch break, she literally bumps into a long-time benefactor of the facility who is also a well-known talent icon. The benefactor has been a patient in the facility in the past. She is so excited that she takes his photograph with her cell phone. She shares the photos with her coworkers. The next day, she posts the photos on Facebook. Her director is contacted by the CEO. Is this an ethical violation?

Discussion

There is definitely a concern. While this act may not have been malicious, the results may have inadvertently caused harm.

The first principle of AHIMA’s Code of Ethics has been abused, but not necessarily violated: “Advocate, uphold, and defend the individual’s right to privacy and the doctrine of confidentiality in the use and disclosure of information.”

Each individual organization will shape policies, practices, and procedures that are consistent with its culture. For some organizations, this will result in zero tolerance for this activity because the employee is in a position in which she should have known better. Other organizations may decide that since this is an excellent employee with a stellar history, the situation calls for education and training.

Tell us what you think. How would you or your organization handle such a scenario?

Original source:

AHIMA Professional Ethics Committee. "Snap Judgment" ([Journal of AHIMA website](#)), April 01, 2010.

Driving the Power of Knowledge

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