Standards, Information Governance, Informatics: Essential Components of HIM Workforce Education

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As the healthcare industry has evolved from paper to the digital environment, topics such as information governance, informatics, and standards—which are at the forefront of healthcare—are becoming critical subjects when educating health information management (HIM) professionals.

Building Workforce Education Standards for HIM Professionals

Many HIM professionals started careers with paper records and have learned about electronic health records (EHRs) on the job when health information technology (HIT) entered the healthcare world. In 2014 the Global Health Workforce Council, facilitated by the AHIMA Foundation with support from the US Department of Commerce, developed Global Academic Curricula Competencies for Health Information Professionals for HIT, HIM, and Informatics (Global Competencies).[1]

These Global Competencies cover various topics, including:

- HIT topics related to technical underpinnings of information systems used in healthcare, including EHR systems and other technologies
- Information governance topics related to capture, management, sharing, use, and reuse of information in healthcare organizations
- Informatics topics related to formulating user requirements for information systems (use cases with workflow and data flow), modeling representation of content (data, information, and knowledge) in HIT applications; applying data analysis algorithms, and use of educational standards
- Standards topics related to standards categories, standardization process and entities, standards harmonization, use of standards to enable semantic, technical, and functional interoperability between applications, and others

Using the Global Competencies, the AHIMA Standards Team has been participating in developing global education standards at the International Organization for Standardization Technical Committee 215 (ISO/TC215) Health Informatics. The newly published standard "ISO Technical Report 18638 Health Informatics, Guidance on Health Information Privacy Education in Healthcare Organizations" has been developed in collaboration with South Korea, Canada, and Australia. The "ISO Technical Specification 22287 Health Informatics, Workforce Roles and Capabilities for Terminology and Terminology Services" is a new project that is under development in collaboration with Canada, Australia, Germany, China, and India.

These workforce development standards are the first ones in the portfolio of standards of the ISO/TC215 Health Informatics. They describe the job tasks—roles, required skills, and competencies of personnel involved in performing these tasks—and approaches for training in academic and vocational settings (in class or online). In addition, these standards provide examples of possible curricula and content modules to help faculty/educators build their courses and deliver training according to the needs of specific organizations or countries.

ISO also provides various foundational standards that can be used to build HIT, HIM, and informatics curricula. For example, the ISO/International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) Joint Technical Committee 1 (ISO/IEC JTC1): Information Technology developed a series of standards including "ISO/IEC Standard 2382 Information Technology, Vocabulary – Part 1: Fundamental Terms" and "Vocabulary – Part 36: Learning, Education and Training." These international standards specify vocabulary (terms) and concepts used in IT education.[2] ISO/TC215 and ISO/IEC JTC1 maintain a relationship between both committees to encourage cross-collaboration.

IG, Informatics, and Standards Defined

Information Governance (IG): An organization-wide framework for managing information throughout its life cycle and supporting the organization's strategy, operations, regulatory, legal, risk, and environmental requirements.[3]

Informatics: A field of study that focuses on the use of technology to improve access to and utilization of information.[4] Informatics is the science behind the data.[5] It defines (models) the requirements for the information systems, so these systems will support user needs (i.e., what information does a user need, when, in what form); how information is collected, when, by whom, in what format; how information is shared, when, with whom, in which format; how information is managed, by whom, and so on.

Standard: A document established by consensus and approved by a recognized body that provides, for common and repeated use, rules, guidelines, or characteristics for activities or their results, aimed at the achievement of the optimum degree of order in a given context.[6]

For more information on workforce education standards, please contact Diana Warner, AHIMA director of standards at diana.warner@ahima.org.

Implementing Workforce Education Standards for HIM and Other Professionals in Healthcare

Though it may feel that the rapidly changing technologies and evolving legislation represent challenges in delivering IG, informatics, and standards education, there are the basic building blocks (modules) related to generation, management, sharing, use, and reuse of health information in both paper and digital environments. The basic building blocks include information governance, including privacy and security principles, health informatics (healthcare workflow and data flow), clinical documentation, revenue cycle management, electronic health records/document management, coding, HIM practice and HIT standards, resource management, and general leadership. These building blocks serve as the foundation whether a student is aiming for a career in a healthcare organization, vendor setting, consultancies, education, or any alternative pathways within each of those settings.

Educators may help students develop core skills by designing lectures and exercises that discuss:

- The capture of data, information, and knowledge
- Assisting clinicians (physicians and nurses) in more efficient methods of clinical documentation
- Setting standards for completeness and accuracy of the record content
- Documenting workflow and data flow in a clinical encounter in the use case format to inform the development of HIT standards
- Clinical document design and template development
- Protecting the use of personal health information; as well as other subjects

Specific group exercises may be developed on creating enterprise-wide policies and procedures, how to design audits to measure the accuracy of information, how to author facility coding guidelines across inpatient, outpatient, post-acute, and physician practice settings, among others.

HIM professionals have a need, in fact an obligation, to ensure that school domains reflect skill and concept training for students in formal education programs that allows them to have the highest chance of success when entering the real world. AHIMA and its Council for Excellence in Education, which develops new workforce competencies for use in education, have the unique opportunity of preparing new graduates for the challenges they face today as well as those that may occur in the coming years. Students today must understand how to work within various organizational settings (i.e., healthcare, government, vendor, non-profit organization, academia) and apply the skills taught in school. More importantly, as the educators for these

students, HIM academics have to move faster and become more flexible in order to adjust educational content to newly emerging HIM needs.

This may mean using technology to develop learning exercises and experiences in reacting to legislative or technology changes, teaching how to write enterprise-wide policies and procedures in information governance, developing HIM practice standards, and guiding the development of HIT standards to support HIM needs in the interoperable IT products. The latter means embracing HIM professionals' core skills in effectively designing capture of data and information, assisting the clinicians in more efficient methods of documentation, setting standards for completeness and accuracy of the record content, fostering information integrity, process mapping, and document design, and protecting personal health information at the highest industry standards.

Additional essential skills include knowing how to design an audit for measuring the accuracy of information, and authoring facility coding guidelines across inpatient, outpatient, post-acute, and physician practice settings.

It is also important to teach ethical, thoughtful, and inspiring leadership skills for HIM personnel to manage personnel, sometimes remotely, and sometimes even off-shore; as well as teach skills in interpersonal relationships, communications, writing, and how to train others. HIM educators have to teach students to be part of a team, yet stand out as unique professionals prepared to evolve, truly lead in setting standards for information management practices, and to be advocates for clinicians and patients.

In addition to academic training, continuing education for HIM and other healthcare professionals in information governance, informatics, and standards is very important, especially due to the changes in technology and regulation discussed above. This type of continuing education can be obtained through vocational training offered by professional associations and educational institutions, as well as by volunteering for projects within the employee's organization, professional associations, and governmental entities.

Additional resources for vocational training include participation in the standards development organizations (SDOs); attending professional conferences and on-the-job training sessions/events; acquiring hands-on learning; and seeking additional opportunities for education through local and state HIM chapters. Networking with other professionals and keeping up-to-date with AHIMA's educational offerings are also recommended.

Notes

[1] AHIMA Global Health Workforce Council. "Global Academic Curricula Competencies for Health Information Professionals." June 30, 2015.

[2] International Organization for Standardization and International Electrotechnical Commission. "ISO/IEC Standard 2382-36:2013, Information Technology – Vocabulary – Part 36: Learning, education and training."

[3] AHIMA. "Information Governance Glossary."

[4] AHIMA. *Pocket Glossary of Health Information Management and Technology.* Third Edition. Chicago, IL: AHIMA Press, 2012.

[5] Friedman, Charles P. "Where's the Science in Medical Informatics?" *Journal of the American Medical Informatics Association* 2, no. 1 (January-February 1995): 65-67.

[6] International Organization of Standardization and International Electrotechnical Commission. "ISO/IEC GUIDE 2:2004: Standardization and related activities – General vocabulary."

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