

Supply and Demand: a Challenge for Healthcare and HIM

Save to myBoK

by Linda Kloss, RHIA, CAE, chief executive officer

AHIMA's work force research found that HIM professionals hold 200 different job titles in 40 types of organizations, from hospitals to veterinary clinics. Just 20 years ago, most worked in acute care hospitals. Today that number is just over 50 percent.

For decades we differentiated "traditional" from "nontraditional" practice, a distinction that is now irrelevant. HIM skills and competencies are needed by all organizations that use person-specific or aggregate patient data. The national push to adopt health IT will accelerate demand for a qualified HIM work force. And new ways to expand the supply need to be explored.

From Nontraditional to Mainstream

Susan Parker describes a method to open doors to new HIM venues in "The End of the Nontraditional Job." To get your foot in these doors, the message is clear: set your sights, do your homework, and market what you can bring to an organization. AHIMA has been engaged in image marketing on behalf of the profession for a number of years. We have certainly had success in raising the field's profile, but this goes only part of the way toward expanding our job opportunities.

AHIMA's e-HIMTM Work Group on Practice Transformation explains how to engage in visioning, a key element of change leadership, in "Visioning e-HIM: A Process for Imagining—and Anticipating—HIM's Future." In "Leading from the Middle," Mark Hagland speaks with HIM leaders who have made a difference for their organizations and their careers by leading from within, essential advice for all who feel that they are not sufficiently involved in IT initiatives.

Mary Teslow, Irene Mueller, and Krista Schmidt offer a new model and process in "Asking the Right Questions: Connecting Users and Data through a Formal Interview Process." The seven-step model will be very helpful to those whose roles involve helping others get access to information for research and decision making.

Supply and Demand Challenges

When compared to nursing, medicine, or other healthcare disciplines, HIM is a relatively small field. Employers may understand the need for someone to manage health information, but they may not know that HIM is a field of academic study. AHIMA's Board of Directors is grappling with the reality that a much larger HIM work force, perhaps three to four times today's size, may be required to fully deploy electronic health records and a national health information network.

The demand for highly competent HIM professionals comes at a time when the current work force is aging and many experienced colleagues will retire in the next 15 years. And while enrollment in HIM programs has increased and the number of programs is expanding, the growth is modest compared to the demand. There is also an experience gap, with employers requiring a level of professional self-sufficiency that a new professional understandably lacks. Not all HIM professionals have had the opportunity to develop the new competencies that will be required to thrive in an e-HIM environment.

As Mervat Abdelhak pointed out in her April "President's Message," now is the time for constructive discussion about how to be more inclusive as a field. We must find ways to bring professionals from other disciplines into HIM to expand and enrich the work force. Like the concept of nontraditional practice, this expansion will be a reality in 10 years. How well HIM fares in this time of extraordinary change will depend on how well we embrace learning, diversity, and change. The prospects could not be brighter.

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