

Survey Predicts Future HIM Workforce Shifts: HIM Industry Estimates the Job Roles, Skills Needed in the Near Future

Save to myBoK

By Ryan Sandefer, MA, CPHIT; David Marc, MBS, CHDA; Desla Mancilla, DHA, RHIA; and Debra Hamada, MA, RHIA

The American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) conducted a study to assess the future needs of the health information workforce. The study was intended to define the current reality of HIM within the healthcare industry, how the market is shifting to meet future needs, and what knowledge, skills, education, and credentials will be necessary to perform successfully as an HIM practitioner in the future. The study consisted of a survey of HIM and related stakeholders and multiple focus groups. This article summarizes key findings from the survey.

Who Took the Survey

Between September 11, 2014 and October 3, 2014, the survey was sent to 59,029 health information management (HIM) professionals and related stakeholders, yielding 6,475 survey views, of which 3,370 responses were included in the final analysis. A total of 58 percent of the respondents were HIM professionals, with the remainder consisting of employers, healthcare professionals, students, educators, and other related groups. AHIMA members made up 89 percent of respondents, 75 percent of respondents were over the age of 45, and 91 percent were female. A total of 60 percent of respondents worked in an acute care setting, with the percentage of respondents from each of the other settings under 10 percent. Approximately 35 percent of respondents had an RHIT credential, 28 percent had an RHIA credential, and 23 percent had a CCS credential.¹

Survey Findings Chart HIM Role Change

The findings from the study illustrate that the health information profession is experiencing significant change, partly spawned by the conversion from paper to electronic health records and the impact of state and federal regulations. Most in the industry acknowledge that HIM professionals will continue to see changes in where they work, how they work, the technology they work with, and the quantity and types of data they are asked to manage. The survey aimed to assess the impact of this change by asking health information professionals to rate the percentage of their time spent on specific tasks currently, and how much time they expect to spend on the tasks 10 years in the future. The overall mean difference in responses were calculated and graphed regarding the percentage of time the respondents anticipated they will spend on these tasks in the future minus the percentage of time they spend on these tasks currently.

As shown in Figure 1, the most significant result was that respondents anticipated they will spend a lower percentage of their time on diagnosis and procedural coding in the future. Nearly two-thirds of HIM professionals currently spend a portion of their time on coding-related tasks—meaning this change will significantly impact the roles and responsibilities of future HIM professionals. Leadership was identified as the task that will increase the most significantly, followed by teaching and informatics. These findings indicate that HIM professionals perceive unique opportunities in diverse settings—management, higher education, and information technologies.

In addition to asking about current and future tasks performed by respondents, the survey also asked respondents two questions to rate the current and future importance of a variety of health information-related competencies. Figure 2 on below visualizes the results from these two questions.

Respondents rated privacy and security, EHR management, and data integrity as the overall most important competencies in the future, while business analytics and research were rated the least important. Of particular note is the perceived decline in the importance of diagnostic and procedural coding and records processing in the future.

Figure 1. Areas HIM Expects to Focus on in the Near Future

this graph shows the mean difference in responses regarding the percentage of time the respondents anticipate they will spend on these tasks in the future minus the percentage of time they spend on these tasks currently. A higher number indicates that respondents anticipate they will spend a greater percentage of time on the task in the future.

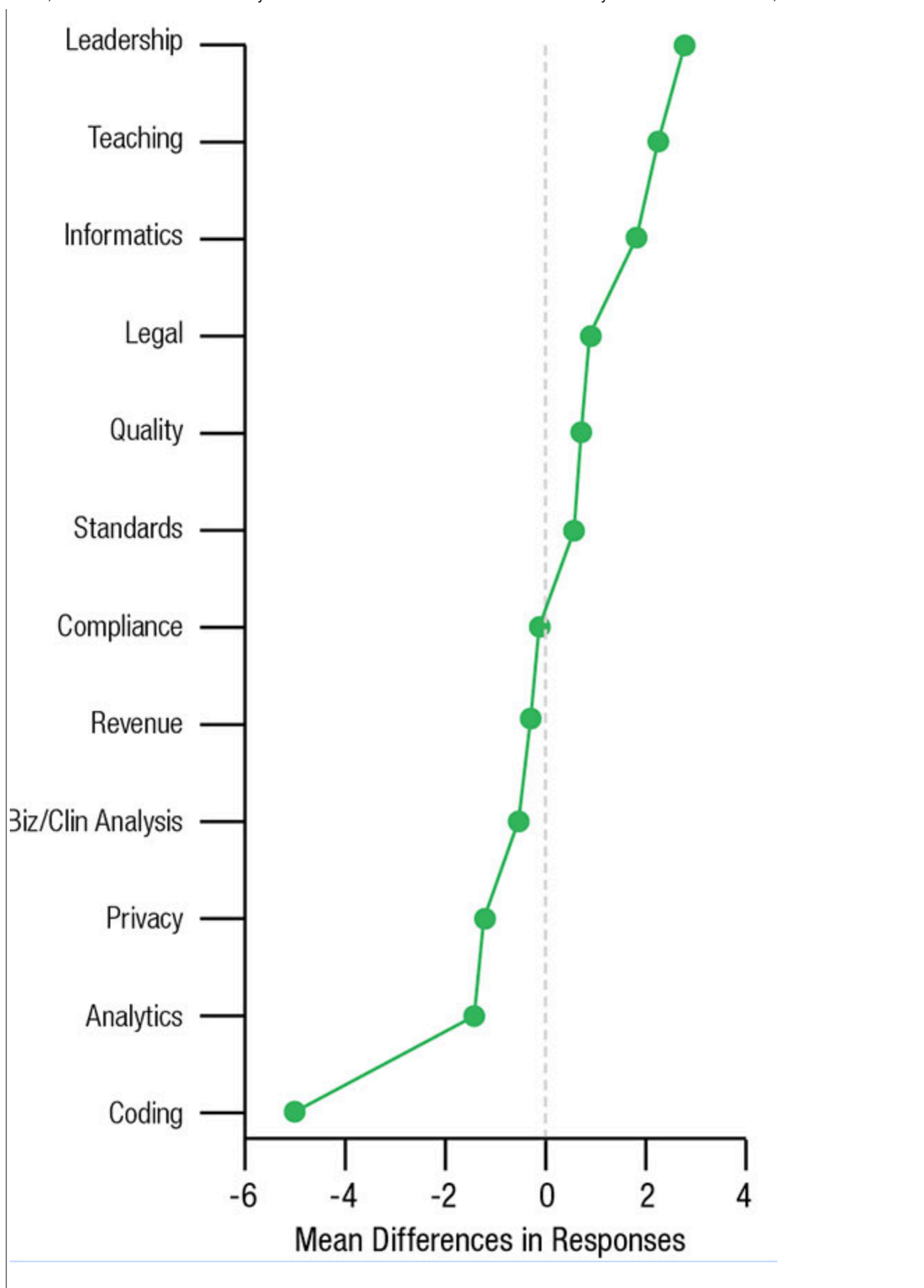
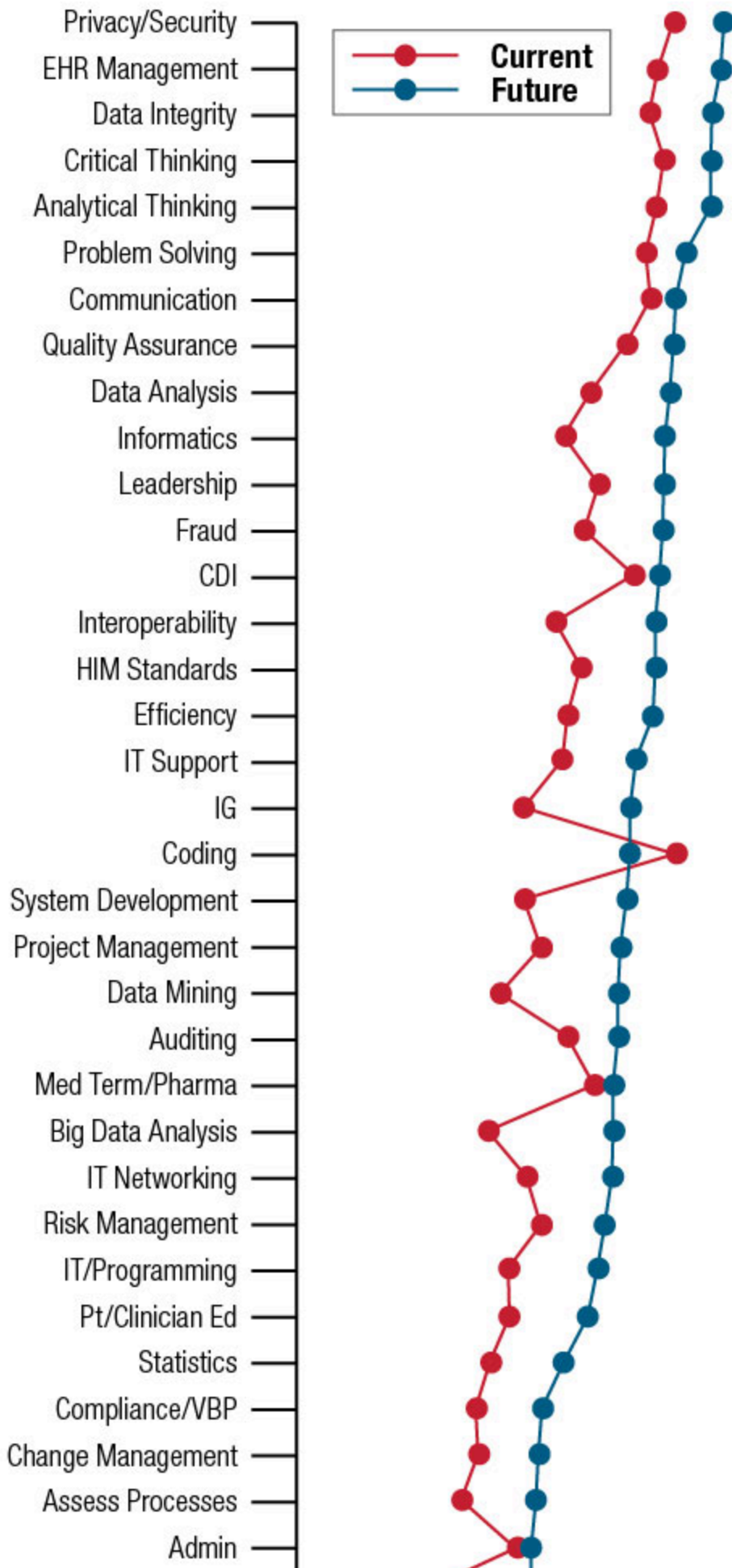


Figure 2. Average Rated Importance for Each Competency Today and in the Future

This graph shows how respondents view the importance of a variety of HIM-related competencies—both today and 10 years in the future.



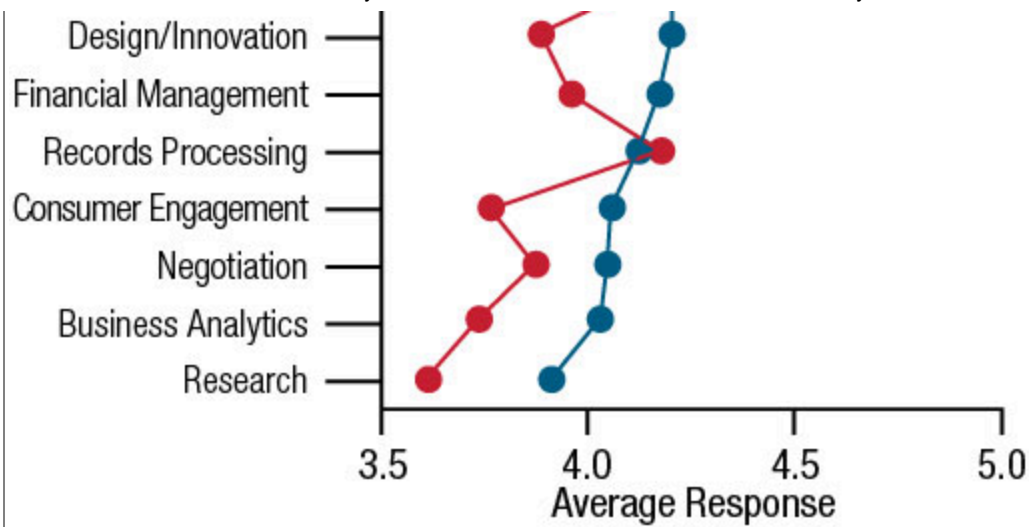
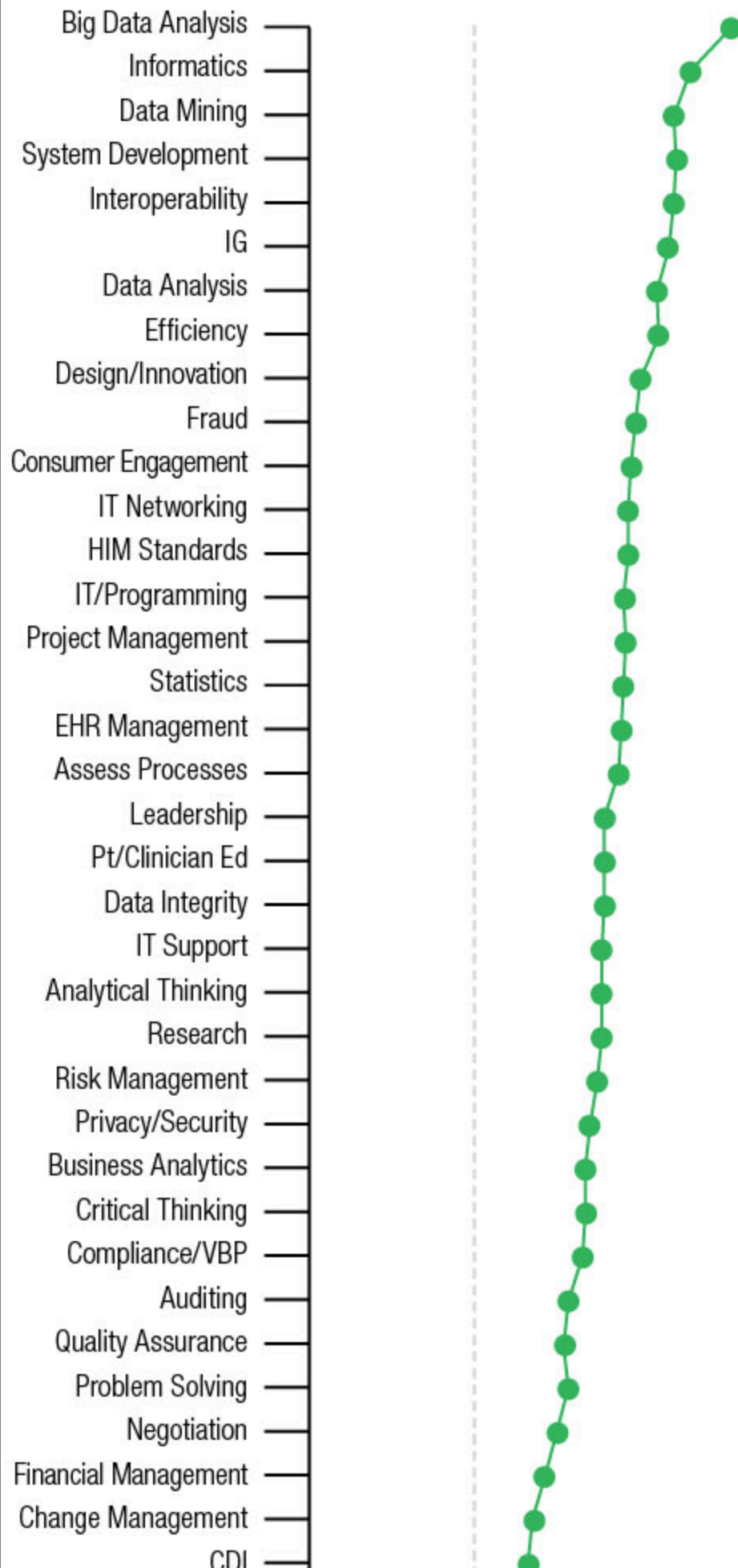
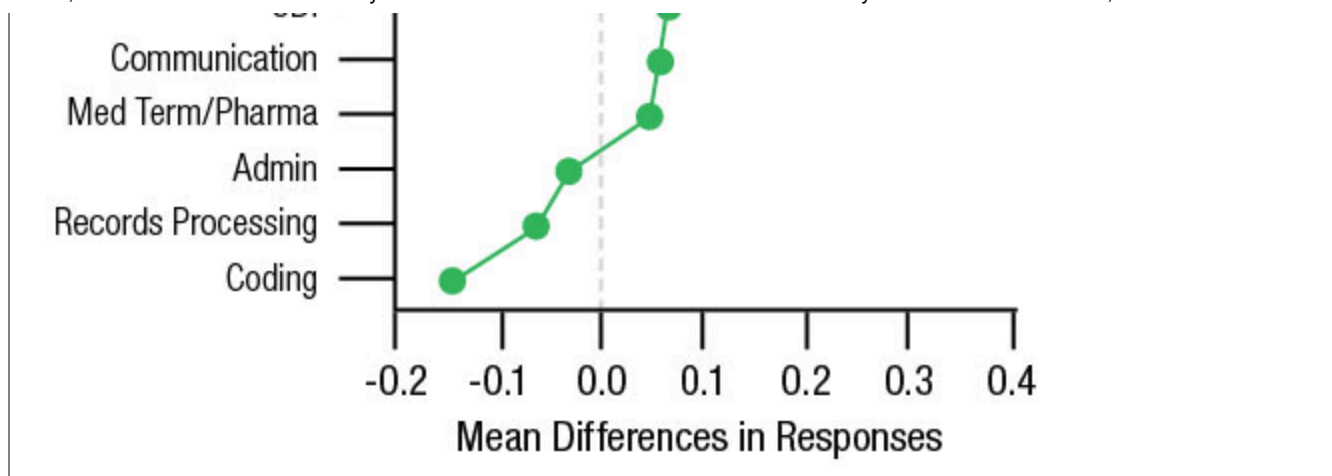


Figure 3. Skills That Will Be More Important in the Future Than Today

This graph shows the mean difference in responses regarding the rating of importance of competencies in the future minus the rating of importance of competencies in the present. A higher number indicates that the importance of a competency is greater in the future compared to today.





Survey Shows Decline in ‘Bread and Butter’ HIM Roles

Figure 3 on above displays the difference in the ratings of competency importance for the future compared to present day. Evidently, the largest growth of future importance is in Big Data analysis, informatics, and data mining. However, the largest decline of future importance is in typical “bread and butter” types of HIM operations, including coding, records management, and administration/staff supervision.

Employer opinions were sought as an additional facet of the study. Like HIM professionals, employers identified coding as the most important skill for the profession today and agreed that its importance will diminish in the future. Globally, the study revealed strong agreement between employers and HIM professionals regarding current and future skill prevalence and importance. The harmony between employers and HIM professionals reinforces the recognition of the changing professional landscape.

Chasm Exists Between Future Jobs and Future HIM Skills

One of the major findings from this study is the apparent chasm between the tasks on which HIM professionals expect to spend time 10 years in the future and the rated importance of future workforce competencies related to those tasks. While HIM professionals rated data analytics and related competencies as an area that will be very important in the future, HIM professionals did not report that they anticipate they will spend a large percentage of their time on data analytics in the future. In other words, HIM professionals, overall, do not perceive themselves stepping into data analytics roles. This leaves us with an important question: why not?

The future of HIM is highly dependent upon leveraging data as an asset. Because of this, AHIMA has established “information governance” as a strategic priority for the association. One of the key drivers of information governance in healthcare is the need for clinical and business analytics. According to a recent AHIMA survey, across the healthcare industry 65 percent of professionals recognized a need for a formal information governance program, yet only 43 percent of organizations have initiated the development of such a program.²

What these findings indicate is that for information governance to be successful, organizations must adopt and support the tools and resources that allow professionals to gain more value from the data. In short, information governance programs must clearly demonstrate a value added in terms of quality improvement, cost savings, and overall business understanding. In order to demonstrate this value, HIM professionals must be more comfortable with the competencies related to data analytics, such as business intelligence, database administration, inferential and descriptive statistics, health information technology, and project management. The interdisciplinary nature of health information creates an environment of multiple stakeholders all needing information for a wide variety of reasons. At the same time there is scant direction in healthcare organizations about who the information management experts are in this age of Big Data. With increased use of technology and the data it creates, HIM professionals must be able to demonstrate the skills needed to analyze data in a way that creates meaningful information upon which other healthcare stakeholders can take action.

HIM Poised to Fill Workforce Data Niche

Data analytics is a newer, widely misunderstood domain within the healthcare ecosystem. The projected growth of data analytics is expected, but defining the roles to meet this demand is difficult. However, HIM professionals are perfectly geared to fill this “data” niche because they have a very strong understanding of healthcare data, operations, and clinical processes. Such expertise is often lacking among applicants who are looking to fill analytics roles.

To meet future healthcare market needs and better define healthcare analytics roles, HIM professionals need to exploit their knowledge. If HIM professionals take a leadership role in this domain, healthcare organizations will be more effective at implementing information governance programs and achieving desired outcomes.

Notes

¹ AHIMA. “Results of the AHIMA 2014 Workforce Study.” March 2015. <http://bok.ahima.org/doc?oid=300801>.

² Cohasset Associates and AHIMA. “2014 Information Governance in Healthcare: Benchmarking White Paper.” 2014. www.ahima.org/~media/AHIMA/Files/HIM-Trends/IG_Benchmarking.ashx.

Ryan Sandefer (rsandefe@css.edu) is chair and assistant professor in the department of health informatics and information management and David Marc (dmarc@css.edu) is assistant professor of health informatics and graduate program director at the College of St. Scholastica. Desla Mancilla (desla.mancilla@ahimafoundation.org) is senior director of academic affairs at the AHIMA Foundation. Debra Hamada (dhamada@llu.edu) is chair of health informatics and information management and assistant professor, program director of the health informatics master’s program at Loma Linda University.

Article citation:

Sandefer, Ryan; Marc, David; Mancilla, Desla; Hamada, Debra. "Survey Predicts Future HIM Workforce Shifts: HIM Industry Estimates the Job Roles, Skills Needed in the Near Future" *Journal of AHIMA* 86, no.7 (July 2015): 32-35.

Driving the Power of Knowledge

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