

# Tackling Backlogs and Hurdles

[Save to myBoK](#)

*by Jane Jeffries, associate editor*

Not only did Kim Schwartz, RHIA, tackle a payment backlog of more than two years, she did it entirely on her own, without a predecessor or peers to guide her.

Schwartz is the insurance coordinator for the athletic training department at Iowa State University in Ames, IA. The university functions as a secondary payer for the school's 500 student athletes, meaning that athletic injury claims are first submitted to the student's insurance company and the remaining balance is paid by Iowa State. For Schwartz, that means collecting insurance information from students and submitting it to providers, researching claims, and in many cases, acting as a utilization reviewer to make sure the school is paying for appropriate services.

"I'm really creating this position as I go along," Schwartz says, having taken over a job that used to be outsourced. "My supervisors trust me and let me run with my ideas."

## Visible Progress

When Schwartz arrived at Iowa State in fall 2000, she found a two-year backlog of claims payments waiting for her. She spent a lot of time researching claims and talking to parents and providers. "Once the providers realized I was here, everyone wanted their money," she says. Fortunately, "the college bent over backwards to help. In the first three months I was here, I had to ask the administration to double its medical claims budget, which hadn't been increased in three years." Schwartz adds, "It was really rewarding to eliminate the huge backlog. At the end of the day, I could see hard numbers and piles to show what I'd accomplished."

Only in recent months has Schwartz been able to turn her attention to current work. Her contact with student athletes usually occurs before they go into surgery and in fact, more of her work is with the athletic trainers. The trainers function almost like case managers for students, according to Schwartz. "They watch the students through the continuum of care through their whole schooling. The trainer works with physicians and hospitals," Schwartz says.

The students' care is recorded in the athletic department's computerized medical record, known as the Sports Injury Monitoring System (SIMS). SIMS contains information about the athlete's diagnoses, treatments, medications, and more. Privacy concerns are alleviated because SIMS is kept within the athletic department.

Iowa State covers injuries only related to sports, though it occasionally extends coverage to illnesses or medical emergencies occurring during the sports season. "This is a tough part [of the job]," Schwartz says. "We can't be responsible for everything that comes up, but we don't have really clear, set guidelines in place. Also, the coaches are trying to recruit the best players, but the best players may not have the best insurance. But we treat all students the same, whether they have insurance or not."

## Take Another Look

Schwartz first learned about HIM when she met a hospital director while working in her mother's dress shop after finishing high school. Having worked in hospital settings throughout her career and most recently as a director of HIM and business office, Schwartz was anxious to try something new. She found her current position on the Web and was drawn to an academic atmosphere. However, forging her own path in the athletic training department is not without its challenges. "I'm the only [HIM] accredited person at Iowa State and I'm the only person in this position. There aren't a lot of people to network with because other schools don't always have this position. I like to bounce ideas off people and I can't do much of that here," she says.

At the same time, Schwartz is happy in her role. "At Iowa State, I've learned a little more how to play-it's a more laid-back atmosphere. I recently had lunch with some HIM professionals who were very stressed out about APCs and HIPAA. There's

always going to be something to be stressed out about, but we have to enjoy our jobs. If you don't enjoy your job, you have to take a look at why you are doing it."

---

**Article citation:**

Jeffries, Jane. "Tackling Backlogs and Hurdles." *Journal of AHIMA* 72, no.7 (2001): 112.

---

**Driving the Power of Knowledge**

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