

# Team Talks: An Eye to the Future

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by Barbara P. Fuller

This winter's Team Talks gave members a glimpse of an exciting new member benefit: Communities of Practice (CoP). When members saw a demonstration of CoP in action, there was a universally enthusiastic response about the opportunities this new feature will provide. Currently in beta testing, CoP will offer virtually limitless opportunities for members to obtain information, provide input, and participate in communities built around their particular interests.

When the AHIMA Board of Directors developed a plan for providing a rapid response to changes in the HIM field two years ago, a keystone of this plan was the formulation of CoP. The board anticipated that CoP would facilitate AHIMA member interaction regarding areas of expertise, issues affecting the profession, and common interests. In October, CoP will be a reality for all members.

## Members Connect Through CoP

What are CoP? And how will they affect the AHIMA member? AHIMA has developed a concept that combines state-of-the-art technology with user-friendly applications. CoP are groups of AHIMA members that "meet" and have "conversations" via their computers. Internet technology will allow members to exchange information, vote on issues, store articles or information of interest, post information on a community calendar, and many other functions that will enhance the activities of a group or community.

When members first visit the CoP, they will be able to complete an online profile of their work setting, job responsibilities, and areas of interest. Then, they can join any existing community or even create a new community. The system is designed so individual members can join, create a community of members with a common interest, or withdraw from a community—all from their home or office—instantaneously. Communities can consist of a state association, a group with an interest in a particular practice issue (APCs, for example), or any other reason why members might want to "talk" to other members and share information. And the cost of joining or creating a community of practice? No additional cost to members, regardless of the number of communities they join.

Along with the other communities, the AHIMA Board of Directors have been beta testing the CoP since February. So far, users have been excited and enthusiastic. The board has taken advantage of many CoP functionalities, including the ability to easily share information on a wide range of topics, vote on an issue coming before the board via the polling mechanism, and create a library that contains documents of particular interest to the community. For example, rather than send a document to all members of the community, documents are filed in the community's library. Then, whenever community members wish to look at a document, they just go to the community library and click on the document they wish to view.

CoP will be demonstrated at the national convention in Miami Beach and should be available for all members immediately afterward. For more information about CoP, see "Members Test Drive Communities of Practice" (*Journal of AHIMA* or online in the AHIMA Library).

## Make HIM Education Your Priority

The challenges HIM educational programs are currently facing was another topic of discussion at Team Talks. We heard about HIM programs with low enrollment, difficulty finding practice sites, and a variety of issues that make it difficult to meet the needs of the profession and the students. These are challenges for all of us because the students are the future of our profession. In areas where HIM programs no longer exist, non-HIM professionals are obtaining positions simply because there are no credentialed professionals available.

Individually and at the Association level, we must find creative and effective ways to provide the support necessary for our educational programs to thrive. I encourage individual members to contact their local HIM programs and volunteer to serve as

a mentor, to host a practice site, or in any other capacity that will fill a need. I encourage state associations to offer a forum for educators to describe their successes and challenges and to provide support mechanisms to address these issues.

Let's make education a top priority. Adopt a student. Adopt an educator. Adopt a school. Ensure the future of our profession.

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