

The Year Ahead

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By Alan F. Dowling, PhD, chief executive officer

Welcome to 2011, a year in which opportunities abound!

This is a year in which we are likely to see increased collisions between preconceived notions and innovative concepts, between optimistic projections and implementation realities.

This year many individuals from a variety of backgrounds will enter into the realm of health, information, and management. Some will come from ARRA-funded training programs, others from advanced educational programs. Still others will retread their prior nonhealth experience to pursue healthcare opportunities. With them will come a wide variety of perceptions and conceptions about the appropriate management of health information. This will inevitably increase the debate about HIM's basic tenets and, in some quarters, lead to challenges to the logic, ethics, and principles underpinning HIM.

Rather than viewing this collision of ideas as a threat, we are better served by seeing it as an opportunity to lead and be recognized as leaders in the promotion of the best HIM practices and ethics.

The practices we promote must be grounded on their enduring validity, regardless of the technology that underpins them. However, rapid technological innovation will be an opportunity for HIM professionals to lead in shaping innovative technologies to serve the best patient-centered practices and principles of HIM.

Demonstrating Value in Change

This year is likely to see increasing pragmatic recognition that healthcare is rendered not only in institutions, but in post-acute environments, workplaces, and homes. But this recognition-which should promote the integration of patient care data with nontraditional patient-related data sets-may unfortunately be overshadowed by the pursuit of eligibility for ARRA-funded reimbursement.

Nevertheless, this year will introduce many new approaches and technologies, a natural free-market response to the health industry's needs and spending power. Increasingly we will see the marriage of biomedical engineering and diagnostic, therapeutic, and effectiveness information in new devices that range from a wearable, portable personal health record to omnipresent physiological monitoring systems to diffusion of technology-based diagnostic devices. This affords HIM professionals a much expanded scope of responsibility.

So, this year will bring opportunity. It will be the opportunity to materially expand our definition of the depth and scope of HIM and HIM's role in this new world's explosive health information environment, to prepare ourselves to manage in this environment, and to demonstrate HIM's enduring value in the tumultuous environment that will be 2011.

In This Issue

In the cover story, AHIMA staff describe seven stories they will be following in 2011. Each of these stories illustrates the sweeping changes under way, from EHR adoption incentives to ICD-10 preparation, from shifting payment models to new privacy and security regulations.

Although the environment around us changes, core HIM values and responsibilities do not. These include ensuring that protected health information remains confidential yet accessible for care. "Sorting out Advance Directives" reviews the differences in the legal documents that authorize an individual to manage another person's healthcare, including access to their medical records. Understanding the distinctions ensures information is released to an individual's authorized representatives.

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