

The Year That Was and the Year to Be

Save to myBoK

By Don Asmonga, MBA

The second session of the 111th Congress began with the Democrats in firm control of the House and Senate. Working from their position of power enabled the Democrats to pass healthcare reform.

Although Congress was mired in contentious debates, AHIMA still advocated for its public policy agenda, including:

- Ensuring that healthcare reform included administrative simplification to expedite the publication of proposed and final rules related to health information and health information exchange standards
- Ensuring the selection of a neutral body to develop operating rules for HIPAA's electronic transactions
- Reauthorizing title VII of the Public Health Service Act and introducing and enacting the AHIMA-drafted Allied Health and Health Information Education Incentive Act
- Updating the Standard Occupational Classifications for HIM
- Preventing legislative language that would delay or eliminate the ICD-10 transition
- Ensuring the creation of crosswalks between ICD-9 and ICD-10

Administrative Simplification

Healthcare reform presented AHIMA with a natural vehicle for pursuing its legislative initiatives. Although there was concern it would not pass, AHIMA used the bill to advocate for some of its issues without taking a position on the larger question of healthcare reform.

AHIMA's primary objective in the healthcare reform bill was to include administrative simplification language that would expedite the HIPAA standards rules development and adoption process and legislative language that would require the National Committee on Vital and Health Statistics recommend an independent, nonprofit body to develop operating rules for information exchange, such as the Council for Affordable Quality Healthcare's Committee on Operating Rules for Information Exchange, of which AHIMA is an endorsing organization.

"Operating rules build on existing standards to make electronic transactions more predictable and consistent, regardless of the technology," according to the Council for Affordable Quality Healthcare.¹ They enable interoperability among organizations that exchange healthcare data by outlining organizations' rights and responsibilities, security requirements, transmission standards and formats, response time standards, liabilities, exception processing, and error resolution.

The administrative simplification and operating rules language was included in section 1104 of the bill.

In addition, section 10109 of the healthcare reform bill also required the ICD-9-CM Coordination and Maintenance Committee regularly revise and update the crosswalks between ICD-9-CM and ICD-10-CM/PCS.

Workforce Initiatives

AHIMA also actively pursued several workforce initiatives in 2010. First, AHIMA drafted the Allied Health and Health Information Education Incentive Act to reauthorize title VII of the Public Health Service Act and actively sought avenues for it to be considered by Congress. Although the bill received interest from several congressional offices, it was not introduced. It remains a priority for AHIMA this year.

AHIMA also lobbied Congress to encourage the Bureau of Labor Statistics to update the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) categories for HIM professionals. AHIMA's effort was led by Rep. David Wu, whose letter urged the Bureau of Labor Statistics:

- Rename the title category 29-2071.00 to "Medical Records and Health Information Specialists"
- Consider subcategories under this existing primary classification, including 29-2071.01 Medical Records and Health Information Technician, and 29-2071.02 Medical Records and Health Information Manager
- Remove Health Information Manager occupational information from 11-9111.00 (114c) and place it within the SOC category 29-2071.00

SOC category 29-2071.00 (116c), Medical Records and Health Information Technicians, is inaccurate and out of date and includes some workers already captured in other SOC categories. Similarly, SOC category 11-9111.00 (114c), Medical and Health Services Managers, inaccurately places HIM specialists with healthcare administrators, nursing administrators, and other departmental services within a traditional hospital.

AHIMA's research suggests more than half of health information specialists at the managerial and executive levels work in nonacute care organizations, government, technology firms, and numerous other healthcare support areas external to the traditional medical record department.

Although there was some positive movement at the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the SOC categories for HIM professionals remain unchanged. AHIMA contends that the classifications still do not accurately address the HIM profession. AHIMA will be reviewing its professional roles and developing a proposal for the next SOC updating process in 2013.

The New Congress and Hill Day

Working with the 112th Congress will likely require some new strategies for AHIMA. The Senate will remain in the hands of the Democrats, while the House will now be led by the Republicans and Speaker of the House John Boehner (R-OH). The Republicans picked up 65 seats to win the majority in the House and now have a 242–193 advantage over the Democrats. Although the Democrats remain in control of the Senate, their grip on the majority has slackened. Republicans picked up five seats, bringing the margin to 53 Democrats (including two Independents) and 47 Republicans. This shift brings new committee chairmen, committee members, and priorities.

To educate Congress, new and old, AHIMA will undertake an introductory letter-writing campaign for all levels of the organization—the national association, component state associations, and individual members. In addition, AHIMA will host its annual Hill Day on March 29. Hill Day offers members the opportunity to introduce themselves to, interact with, and create networking relationships with their senators and representatives.

Hill Day also provides members the opportunity to advocate for pressing HIM issues. AHIMA's 2011 advocacy and influence agenda includes the following objectives:

- Advancing HIM's impact on the health industry by developing and promoting HIM positions and standards to federal and state governments and relevant organizations
- Engaging and promulgating research and thought leadership to advance best practices in HIM, including the strategic focus areas of clinical data and documentation integrity; coding; confidentiality, privacy, and security; electronic health record adoption and health information exchange advancement; and ARRA-HITECH and meaningful use
- Engaging members in industry leadership activities

Several of these objectives are specific to advocacy, including:

- Providing position arguments, testimony, or comment on critical HIM issues by monitoring and responding to federal-level issues within AHIMA's strategic focus
- Increasing the number of volunteers involved in leadership activities that advance policy by developing a process that identifies, qualifies, and supports volunteers to fulfill leadership positions
- Influencing legislators or regulators in key HIM areas at the state and federal levels by:
 - Advocating for workforce development support
 - Advocating for privacy legislation modification to accommodate current technology and environment
 - Advocating for appropriate inclusion of ICD-10, SNOMED CT, and other terminologies in stage 2 meaningful use
 - Advocating for appropriate governance of terminologies and classifications

- Ensuring that legislation related to accountable care organizations, medical home, the Nationwide Health Information Network, value-based purchasing, and Medicare and Medicaid follows HIM principles and practices
- Providing training for component state associations to address HIM issues at the state level

Over the past year, AHIMA's Washington office, in conjunction with its State Advocacy Workgroup, implemented an advocacy education campaign that included virtual and live sessions at Summer Team Talks and AHIMA's Annual Convention and Exhibit. This advocacy education campaign will continue in 2011 and beyond and will include a series of virtual training and information sessions for Hill Day.

Advocacy is an essential part of AHIMA's role representing its more than 60,000 members. However, success requires we advocate at all levels-nationally, at the state level, and individually. We face a wide range of issues that will affect the HIM profession for years to come. In order to succeed, we all must be active in advocating for the profession.

Video Online

<http://journal.ahima.org>

Don Asmonga discusses AHIMA's upcoming Hill Day and the HIM issues members and staff will address with their representatives.

Note

1. Council for Affordable Quality Healthcare. "CORE FAQs." Available online at www.caqh.org/CORE_faq.php.

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