

Time to Get on Board with IG

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By Cassi Birnbaum, MS, RHIA, CPHQ, FAHIMA

Not a day goes by for HIM and healthcare industry leaders without challenges that result from a lack of trust in the data and information we encounter in our work—or in caring for our loved ones. Years ago, when I was working as the director of quality and resource management at a well known healthcare organization, an unfavorable article was printed on the front page of the newspaper. The article referenced a piece published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* that stated people living in La Jolla, CA had a twofold chance of having heart surgery over those living in comparable cities. After the initial shock of the article subsided, I decided to dig in and analyze the data at our facility. I determined that a large number of patients—40 percent—had the hospital address listed in their record rather than an actual home address.

Deeper digging revealed a health plan contractual arrangement that required suppression of the patient's copy of the hospital bill. The hospital's legacy system vendor identified listing the hospital address for patients as a workaround to ensure the bill did not reach the patient's doorstep. Though the newspaper printed retractions, the IT issue was addressed, and the error was corrected, the organization had to pay a sizeable fine to address the data integrity issues with the State of California's discharge reporting program.

This personal experience of mine is just one of many examples that demonstrate the price of bad data—from a reputation, financial, clinical, and service delivery standpoint. Today, there are risks associated with value-based reimbursement and inaccurate data, which result in costly denials of payment due to collection or reporting error. Organizations also face losing their status in networks of care when saddled with unfavorable rankings amongst comparable hospitals.

The ability to trust in data that is translated to information and used for clinical, financial, and operational decision making is a business imperative, and is essential to the many industry initiatives currently underway as we work toward the ultimate goal of improving population health.

When I reflect on the work accomplished during my tenure on AHIMA's Board of Directors, beginning in the fall of 2013, I am proudest of what we have done in the area of information governance (IG). We have made an indelible mark on the healthcare industry, built on a solid foundation of accomplishments in business and industry. The complete transition to electronic systems is hampered by the lack of agreed upon standards and oversight, lack of interoperability, and poorly designed workflows that do not address accurate, timely, and complete capture of documentation. These issues, coupled with consolidation and the proliferation of health information exchange in the healthcare marketplace, represent a growing and increasingly complex challenge. As the healthcare industry strives for interoperability, and increasingly shares information with engaged consumers, the work of ensuring information is trustworthy can be greatly enhanced with the implementation of an IG program. Adopting an IG program demonstrates an organization's commitment to managing its information as a valued strategic asset.

AHIMA has developed a treasure trove of resources to fuel IG in healthcare and will continue to build the HIM Body of Knowledge as our work continues. More information is available at www.ahima.org/topics/infogovernance. Now is the time to realize our IG vision!

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