

# Time to Step Up: HIM Professionals Embrace Growth in Health Data Analyst Role

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By Lisa Brooks Taylor, RHIA

Each year the AHIMA national convention ends with an inspirational speaker. In 2012, in a personal and well-received chat, comedian Joy Behar shared in her emblematic, witty, and straight forward style a three-step life motto that led to her success:

1. Show up
2. Warm up
3. Step up

Her words are especially relevant during this year of pivotal health reform. Now is the time for HIM professionals to emphasize their education and credentials, assert their accomplishments, and step up to the industry-wide call for health data analysts.

The healthcare industry is discovering, as other data-intensive industries have before it, that investing in analytic capabilities is required for success. HIM professionals have begun to hear the terms business intelligence, clinical intelligence, healthcare intelligence, and advanced analytics. Whatever the buzzword, all these terms depend upon accurate, complete, and trustworthy data. HIM professionals are stewards of data for the healthcare industry, with an understanding of the delivery system, its settings and professions, and the medico-legal role of the health record.

In addition to traditional healthcare settings, HIM professionals work in quality improvement, quality reporting, risk management, research, and public health. Wherever there is health data, there is a need for a HIM professional to manage the data as well as analyze, interpret, and present information required for decision making.

## Show Up

Those with a HIM credential in hand have completed the first step—"show up." The basic knowledge domains required of a health data analyst are included in the HIM curriculum for both the RHIA and RHIT, and include:

- Healthcare information systems
- Health data management, including data structure, content, and standards
- Clinical terminologies
- Reimbursement methodologies
- Health statistics
- Biomedical research
- Quality management

Master's-level HIM programs require more extensive demonstration of competencies in advanced data analytics and outcomes as well as development and implementation of policies and procedures to support information and data governance. Even if it has been some time since earning a HIM credential, AHIMA has supported continuing education in these domains with resources such as Journal of AHIMA articles, books, webinars, online learning, and scholarship funding for graduate-level education.

## Warm Up

HIM professionals are well entrenched in the second step—"warm up." They support and perform data analysis on a daily basis. HIM professionals manage indices, databases, and registries. They create and use operational dashboards to trend data.

They also perform coding audits and compare against national benchmarks. HIM professionals create provider profiles using MS-DRGs, length of stay, charges, admission/readmission rates, evaluation and management levels, and ambulatory payment classifications. They compile ad hoc reports combining clinical and financial data. HIM professionals also work with and in IT departments, developing data dictionaries and databases, fulfilling data requests, and scrubbing data. HIM professionals are integral participants in quality monitoring, quality reporting, and health information exchange (HIE).

Realizing the value of formal recognition of HIM expertise in data analysis, AHIMA created the Certified Health Data Analyst (CHDA) specialty credential. The credential demonstrates expertise in the domains of data management, data analytics, and reporting. CHDAs manage, analyze, interpret, and transform data into accurate, consistent, and timely information while balancing strategic vision with day-to-day details. More information on the CHDA credential is available at [www.ahima.org/certification/chda.aspx](http://www.ahima.org/certification/chda.aspx).

## Step Up

Now is the time for the third step—"step up." The healthcare industry has entered an era of advanced data analytics, and there is a workforce shortage of health data analysts. There is unprecedented growth in the number of health data analytic companies, development of advanced data analytic tools for the healthcare industry, establishment of healthcare enterprise-wide data warehouses, and maturing health information exchange. With the emergence of new value-based purchasing methodologies, accountable care organizations, the Medicare Shared Savings Program, and the Bundled Payments for Care Initiative, organizations now have the opportunity to aggregate longitudinal data and integrate clinical data with financial data.

The ability to look at data from across the continuum of care is new for most organizations. The HIM professional, with the unique lynchpin position between the clinical, financial, regulatory, and legal realms, has a deep understanding of the data elements and the vocabulary of end users. This subject matter expertise will be called upon to enhance the ongoing analytic "conversations" between decision-makers and the data to identify actionable insights and respond to industry challenges.

In a January 2013 presentation to the AHIMA Board, Joseph J. Fifer, president and CEO of the Healthcare Financial Management Association, emphasized the necessity for "strong HIM professionals," and "the opportunity for HIM professionals to step up." He spoke of a stronger alliance between the finance and HIM departments that is more collaboratively and strategically focused. In addition, he called for HIM participation in the following types of data projects:

- Pricing out service lines and bundled episodes of care, and comparison of costs across care settings
- Identification of variations in physician practice patterns
- Integration of financial and clinical data to quantify return on investment of clinical performance improvement efforts
- Identification and measurements of utilization, clinical outcomes, and costs for specific populations (i.e., chronic conditions, frail and elderly)

Value-based purchasing has the potential to propel the HIM profession forward as dramatically as the introduction of DRGs, opening doors to additional career paths for HIM professionals. In this data-driven industry, the CHDA will be a highly valued member of the analytics team. The AHIMA interactive career map found at <http://hicareers.com/CareerMap/> offers the opportunity to explore the informatics and data analysis job family. Interested professionals may use this tool to help discover the promotional and transitional career paths for the CHDA and to set career goals.

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