

# Two Golden Opportunities

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*by Barbara P. Fuller, JD, RHIA*

What an exciting time for our profession! As the leaders in HIM, we are being recognized as valuable resources in analyzing and assessing the recently published standards for privacy of individually identifiable health information. When these regulations were announced by President Clinton before a relatively small, invitation-only audience, AHIMA was represented by our Washington, DC, associates, Dan Rode and Don Asmonga. This was confirmation that the Department of Health and Human Services recognized AHIMA's contributions in formulating regulations that are so important for the protection of the health information privacy of individuals throughout the United States.

Now it is our responsibility-and opportunity-to read the regulations and assess their impact on our work environments. Further, we should look at these regulations as a golden opportunity to display our expertise. Protecting the privacy of health information has always been one of the pillars of our profession. Now, these regulations embody and manifest some of our basic tenets for maintaining health information privacy.

Make sure you are the first in your organization to read these regulations and understand their impact. And let your employer know you are the expert on these regulations. We have missed other tailor-made health information opportunities after other healthcare professionals staked them out for their own. But the protection of health information privacy is unquestionably our issue.

## Take Another Look at FORE

Have you ever considered a contribution to FORE, the Foundation of Research and Education? FORE funds both undergraduate and graduate scholarships for outstanding students in HIA and HIT programs across the country. In 2000, 36 students received FORE scholarships. However, FORE had received more than 96 requests for scholarships from qualified applicants. Consequently, more than 60 outstanding students did not receive financial support that would have made it easier for them to pursue or continue their HIA or HIT education.

To give you an idea of the effect these scholarships can have on students, following are some excerpts from their letters: "Words cannot express the gratitude I feel toward FORE...your faith in me raises my hopes and fills my heart." Another recipient wrote, "I am an older-than-average student who has longed to get back to college for many years. This scholarship will be a great help to me in achieving my goal of becoming an RHIT." These students are the future of our profession. Don't underestimate the value of your contribution to FORE.

AHIMA has recently announced a FORE scholarship in memory of Rita Finnegan, MA, RHIA, CCS. Finnegan touched the lives of many AHIMA members as a teacher, mentor, scholar, leader, and friend. Launched with an extremely generous gift from MC Strategies, Inc., and a matching contribution from AHIMA, this scholarship affords us the opportunity to contribute to the future of our organization and to recognize the contributions Finnegan made over her many years of dedication to our profession. If you have never made a contribution to FORE or if even you are a current FORE donor, consider contributing.

## Developing the Profession through Research

In addition to scholarships, FORE also funds a grant-in-aid program that provides funding for research into HIM issues. FORE funded two grants in 2000: research into the content and structure of electronic medical records (EMRs) and an investigation of direct entry into the EMR and the physician-patient relationship. We must acknowledge the value of funding research and make financial support available for those who help us look into the future.

A recent grant-in-aid recipient wrote, "Not only does the grant-in-aid program provide funds and opportunities for HIM researchers, it also provides HIM students the opportunities to work on these projects, which will enable them to conduct research on their own someday. All in all, the program is a very vital part of AHIMA."

You have a stake in the future of AHIMA and a tangible way to support this future is to contribute to FORE. Through scholarships for outstanding students or through support of research into the basic concepts of HIM, we can ensure that we design our professional future. u

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