

Weathering the Storm: How HIM Professionals Can Thrive in a Tumultuous Year

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These are turbulent times, and healthcare is feeling the effects of many external forces. A PricewaterhouseCoopers' report recently outlined nine issues that will disrupt the industry this year. While not every issue is relevant to the HIM profession, several will have a major impact.

Investing in Education

One area already affecting healthcare is the economy. Organizations will have to get back to basics and create efficiencies, according to the report.

In these hard times, core business is paramount, so IT investments may decrease due to reduced charitable donations. It remains to be seen if the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act will be effective in providing the incentives and dollars needed to jumpstart health IT implementation.

There is a real possibility that more organizations will outsource HIM functions due to the economic downturn. This means that HIM professionals will be working in even more diverse settings, including contracting companies or outsourced providers.

HIM professionals should invest in additional or enhanced skills to be able to adapt, or perhaps even lead, to these new areas, which will include data quality analysis, development of automated functionality, and consulting opportunities.

Ensuring Data Quality and Privacy

Another area to watch is hospital performance and reimbursement, according to PricewaterhouseCoopers. Reporting and analysis will become key to demonstrating quality care. AHIMA's Certified Health Data Analyst credential demonstrates practitioner expertise in this area and is an excellent example of where the profession can continue to expand and take the lead.

Technology will also play an important role in HIM's future. Although organizations are feeling the pinch of the economic downturn, health reform cannot happen without a strong technological presence. In particular, the PWC report identifies consumer empowerment as a way to connect patients with their providers.

As social networking sites and other technologies begin permeating healthcare, the importance of core HIM principles, such as privacy and security, cannot be underestimated. The HIM profession can help organizations with these areas. HIM professionals have already started educating the public on these principles with AHIMA's myPHR and community education campaign.

Easing the ICD-10 Transition

Finally, the transition to ICD-10-CM/PCS will prove to be a formidable challenge, according to the report. ICD-10 will provide better information for public health, reduce health disparities, and allow evidence-based medical research to improve care.

That said, the conversion will not be easy. AHIMA and HIM professionals are mobilizing to help train healthcare workers on the system and prepare for the conversion.

HIM professionals will play a key role in helping the industry adapt to these forces and minimize disruption as much as possible.

Reference

PricewaterhouseCoopers, Health Research Institute. "Top Nine Health Industry Issues in 2009." Available online at www.pwc.com/images/us/eng/stimulus/health-ind-issue-09.html.

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