

Welcome to HIM, Watch Your Step: Unique HIM Role Focuses on Blending Education and Workforce Development to Properly Onboard New Hires and Get Students Vital On-the-Job Experience

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By Kristin Nelson, MS, RHIA

A unique job role has been created at the Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center (OSUWMC) related to onboarding, training, and student preceptorship that is seeing positive results and working to get past the Catch 22 of employment—you need experience to get a job, but you need a job to get experience. The role is also helping get new hires up to speed faster through formal onboarding.

The “Program Manager of Education” role was developed in the OSUWMC medical information management (MIM) department after a strategic brainstorming session among senior-level managers in 2008 identified gaps in their onboarding and training processes and policies.

In addition, they wanted someone to serve as a liaison between Ohio State University’s Health Information Management and Systems (HIMS) academic program and OSUWMC’s MIM department.

Because OSUWMC is a teaching hospital, HIMS students are required to complete professional practice experiences (PPE) with the MIM department. The program manager of education therefore serves as a dedicated person to oversee organizing and leading these sessions, as well as assigning students to preceptors within the department to gain hands-on experience.

Overall the role has been received well by managers, employees, and students. This position is essential because it allows the medical center and university to operate together seamlessly for the sharing of resources and the betterment of education for the HIMS students. In addition, it allows for consistent onboarding of new hires, which can be crucial for audits and Joint Commission surveys—allowing staff to do their specific job at the facility faster and better from the start. The success of the program at OSUWMC has officials there encouraging other teaching hospitals to launch similar programs.

EHR Launch Spurs Need for Program Manager

In 2011, OSUWMC went through a “big bang” go-live with an electronic health record (EHR) system. As can be expected, with the go-live came a shift in the way the MIM department did business. Instead of working in campus silos, reporting structures needed to become more streamlined. The department’s MIM assistant director role at OSU East, a community-based hospital, didn’t seem to make sense anymore—and senior leadership agreed to transition the position into one that addresses the onboarding and training needs identified several years earlier during the brainstorming session. This switch made sense since the assistant director had a strong knowledge of HIMS tasks, eight years of management experience, and strong organizational skills, all of which would be needed as a program manager of education.

By 2012 this vision became a reality and the role of program manager of education was born—an innovative job role with part of the position paid by the HIMS program and part of the position paid by the MIM department.

Program Manager of Education Duties, Qualifications

Since the position was brand new, the program manager was afforded the opportunity to write her own job description. The primary focus was education and consistency among training for all MIM new hires and HIMS students.

In the beginning, much of the program manager's time was spent improving training materials, updating policies, and developing a consistent training plan with competencies for staff. As a new teacher, she also had to become accustomed to effective teaching styles. The program manager began to work closely with HIMS Program Administrative Director Laurie Rinehart-Thompson, JD, RHIA, CHP, FAHIMA, to develop more hands-on experiences and up-to-date curriculum for the students when they complete their professional practice experiences. This included more in-depth HIMS informational sessions as a requirement before acceptance to the program. In addition, the program manager began to develop her own way of teaching coding to the HIMS junior-level students.

The program manager of education role is now in its fourth year and has evolved into a crucial position for both the MIM department and the school, so much so that the program manager even has her own office/training classroom with 10 computers to be able to conduct training in more of a classroom type setting. "As new projects or tasks emerge related to education or training we ask, 'Should this task live within [the] job role? Or does [the program manager of education] need to be informed so she can incorporate this into training or the student curriculum?'" says Elizabeth Curtis, RHIA, CHPS, FAHIMA, administrative director of the OSUWMC MIM department.

For example, it was decided in 2013 that the program manager of education would take over computer access requests and onboarding for all of the MIM department's contract employees. "We have contractors in the release of information area, coding, and an entire record storage facility who are dedicated to handling our old paper records. We wanted our contractors to have a background of our facility and department, understand our rules and guidelines, have access issues addressed [in a timely manner] and, most importantly, to feel a part of our team," Curtis says.

Rinehart-Thompson agrees that it has been exceptionally helpful having the program manager of education take over HIMS informational sessions for potential applicants to the program, teaching in the HIMS curriculum, and guiding students' professional practice experiences.

The program manager was also integral in departmental ICD-10 training, helping to organize and conduct initial classroom training and develop material for computer-based online refresher training when the 2014 ICD-10 implementation delay occurred. In addition, the program manager, in conjunction with the MIM department's director of coding, helped to develop a coding apprenticeship program in order to ramp up their coding staff prior to ICD-10 implementation. "We were having difficulty finding talented and experienced coders, so we thought why not groom and grow our own?" Curtis says.

Rinehart-Thompson and Curtis agree that a person in this type of role needs to have a strong understanding of, and background in, health information management (HIM) functions. "Since [the program manager] is onboarding employees in a variety of HIM job roles, including managers and teaching HIM fundamentals, a diverse background is key," Curtis says.

This experience is also necessary when working with HIMS students, Rinehart-Thompson says. "When working with today's students, you have to be inventive, keep their attention, have tough skin, and know your material when they question you," she says.

Managers, employees, and students alike have found value in the new role, Curtis states. "It's nice having a go-to person for anything related to training department staff and HIMS students," she says. "We aren't sure how we did without this position for so long."

Rinehart-Thompson says the program manager of education role is essential, serving as a link between two areas as an MIM department employee and an instructor in the HIMS program. "It allows the two entities to operate together seamlessly for the sharing of resources and the placement of students during their initial clinical PPE experiences and senior-year PPEs at the medical center," she says.

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