

Why Standards Should Matter to HIM Professionals

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By Diana Warner, MS, RHIA, CHPS, FAHIMA

Editor's note: This article introduces Standards Strategies, a new Journal of AHIMA department that will provide guidance to HIM professionals on applying health data standards in areas including business, clinical care, and compliance.

AHIMA has always been committed to working collaboratively with others to develop standards relevant to the management of health information and data. The association's stated mission says "AHIMA leads the health informatics and information management community to advance professional practice and standards."

As such, AHIMA is partnering with healthcare industry stakeholders, including other associations, employers, universities, government agencies, and consumer groups, to increase the use of health data in professional practice, create standards for interoperability, and advocate for their consistent application across the healthcare domain.

This new Standards Strategies column is designed to offer practical applications and best practices for health data standards in business, clinical care, and compliance areas, as well as for legal and evidentiary purposes. This column will convey to HIM professionals the importance of standards in health information management (HIM) practices, including electronic health record (EHR) documentation, compatibility and consistency of health information and data, and reducing the duplication of effort and redundancies in data creation.

As a matter of practical application to support information exchange, EHRs and other data-driven clinical tools must present data in standardized ways, and separate organizations providing services for the same patient need to share information securely. Standards Strategies' article topics will aim to synthesize and align with AHIMA's informatics strategy and other goals relating to data—such as appropriate data use, standards and interoperability, population health, eMeasure quality reporting, and eDiscovery.

Standards Do Matter

Technology has created an unavoidable global economy and has provided easy access to digital information without regard to where a person may be located. Because of this, information must be managed in new ways, including the consolidation of data and its meta-tagging for search functionality and usability. Standards are essential if healthcare hopes to improve. They help reduce medical errors and risks to patient safety, and improve use of and access to EHRs and personal health records.

Appropriate and thoughtful adoption of standards also support innovations in care to enable data aggregation from disparate sources and glean knowledge that can inform life-saving clinical decisions, new procedures, and products—such as new medicines and healthcare equipment. Governments and agencies are now capitalizing on the availability of health information to identify trends in the occurrence, prevalence, and management of health conditions. Better standardization, quality, and accuracy of health information will make it easier to measure changes in population health over time.

The future state of health information is electronic, patient-centered, comprehensive, longitudinal, accessible, and credible. Therefore AHIMA is taking the lead in defining standards for electronic health information. The healthcare industry recognizes HIM professionals as the experts in providing consistent management, guidance, policies, and processes to ensure accurate, accessible health information and improved longitudinal coordination of care.

Standardization in the field of health informatics aims to improve the consistency of health information and data, as well as reduce duplication of effort and redundancies in areas such as healthcare delivery, disease prevention and wellness promotion, public health and surveillance, and clinical research related to health service.

Role of Clinical Documentation Coach

Published in 2013, “ISO/22857: 2013 Health informatics—Guidelines on data protection to facilitate trans-border flows of personal health data” provides important and much-needed guidance on data protection requirements that facilitate the transfer of personal health data across national or jurisdictional borders. In today’s world where people can travel across the globe in a day, there is a need for their data to be accessible and secure wherever they are. This standard is informative with respect to the protection of health information within national/jurisdictional boundaries and provides assistance to national or jurisdictional bodies involved in the development and implementation of data protection principles. This standard and many others are available for sale at the ANSI Online Standards Store at <http://webstore.ansi.org>.

AHIMA’s Participation in Standards

AHIMA actively participates in standards development organizations (SDOs). AHIMA is responsible for the leadership, administrative organization, and management of ISO Technical Committee 215 for Health Informatics for the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). ISO is the world’s largest developer and publisher of international standards. Working in a private-public model, ISO brings together over 160 countries to create consensus-based standards. In the United States, the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) is the US representative and a founding member of ISO. Through ANSI, the US has immediate access and input into globally important standards development processes. ANSI coordinates the US voluntary consensus standards system.

Appointed by ANSI through a competitive process in 2011, AHIMA holds the prestigious designation to provide the Secretariat office to ISO/TC215 and serve as administrator of the United States Technical Advisory Group (US TAG). In these dual roles, AHIMA leads the operations of ISO/TC215 and the US TAG. AHIMA also provides expertise by participating in the standards development processes within ISO and other SDOs such as Health Level Seven, World Health Organization, and International Health Terminology Standards Development Organisation. These are important components of AHIMA’s vision and strategic work to advance HIM and health informatics to enhance the delivery of efficient, safe, and quality healthcare. See the side bar for an example of work recently done through ISO.

Standards are Needed Now, Not Tomorrow

Healthcare is shifting from the ability to simplify the collection of data to the ability to govern and use it effectively in an electronic environment. HIM professionals are needed more than ever, and engagement of HIM professionals in health-related standards development and harmonization will help ensure that the standards match the reality of the health information data, creation, use, and management.

The need for formal standards has been identified by the AHIMA membership as an important way to recognize principles and best practices that enable effective management and governance of health information. Future installments of Standards Strategies will highlight HIM practice standards or guidelines recognized across the healthcare industry as well as international standards that currently impact the HIM profession.

Reference

AHIMA. “[2014-2017 Strategic Plan](#).”

Diana Warner (Diana.warner@ahima.org) is a director of HIM practice excellence at AHIMA.

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