

# Work Force and Education: Promoting New Competencies, Curriculum, and Tools for the New Era

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Healthcare's successful transition to an electronic health record will depend upon a work force capable of innovating, implementing, and using health communications and information technology. A planned approach is needed to train clinicians and existing health information specialists at all levels of healthcare delivery and demonstrate improvements and innovations in academic programs to achieve the goal of an interconnected healthcare system that improves the delivery of healthcare services. AHIMA continues its work to promote these efforts with educators, legislators, and employers.

In 2005 AHIMA and the American Medical Informatics Association sponsored a summit to address work force challenges related to electronic records and a nationwide health information network. Industry stakeholders from academia, professional associations, provider organizations, business professionals, and government officials participated. The national work force action agenda that resulted was published in the report "[Building the Work Force for Health Information Transformation](#)."

This year the two organizations will continue that work by convening an ad-hoc joint task force to take up the following charges:

- Outline a vision of the academic resources and the network needed for health information education leadership
- Enlist the help of other key associations in these efforts
- Define basic core competencies for those who use electronic health records in their daily work
- Advocate for passage of legislation to strengthen programs and increase funding for health information and informatics education programs, student recruitment and retention, faculty training, and education research and standards

There are increasing examples of academic programs for clinicians, healthcare administrators, information technologists, and health information managers where curriculum changes are enhancing education in health informatics. New competencies that emphasize technical and application informatics skills, as well as the ability to educate specialists in IT, information management, and informatics, are appearing on campuses across the nation.

To this end, AHIMA has promoted new entry-level curriculum competencies to be implemented in all HIM academic programs by the 2007–2008 academic year (for more information, see [www.ahima.org/academics](http://www.ahima.org/academics) [web page no longer available] for associate and baccalaureate competencies). To support this effort, a Web-based health IT laboratory is being developed through the cooperative efforts of AHIMA's Foundation of Research and Education, HIM educators, corporate partners, and practitioners. The e-HIM® Virtual Lab will have more than 100 academic programs online by 2007, providing 4,000 students with practice opportunities using some of the industry's newest health record technologies. The Virtual Lab will help ensure a sufficient number of well-qualified HIM professionals join the field in the upcoming years. (For more on the lab, see "HIM Laboratory: Delivering e-HIM Technology to Colleges and Universities -- Virtually" *Journal of AHIMA*, September 2006.)

It is crucial that employers recognize the need to implement and support information management technology training for all healthcare employees. Health IT should be viewed by the industry as an integral part of healthcare work, and all employees should have the knowledge and skills to practice safely, effectively, and efficiently in an electronic environment.

Employers are encouraged to create incentives to align performance and reward systems in healthcare practice settings to include informatics in professional goals and competencies and to encourage the healthcare work force to see health information competencies and skills as professional and personal goals. AHIMA will continue to disseminate tools for the healthcare work force through the sharing of best practices through published resources, Communities of Practice, audio seminars, conferences, and its annual convention.

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