

Writing AHIMA's Next Chapter

Save to myBoK

by Mervat Abdelhak, PhD, RHIA

Earlier this year, AHIMA's Board of Directors defined what success looks like for our profession, our preferred future, and the necessary actions we need to take. Here's what we see in AHIMA's future.

Framing the opportunities. The board foresees the e-HIM™ journey following a migration path from paper-based medical records to the full implementation of electronic health records (EHRs). An emerging national health information infrastructure will create many exciting and rewarding opportunities for our profession. Regional health information organizations will also expand HIM's reach, as consumers take ownership of their personal health information. Opportunities will also come in the form of:

- Health record content standards development
- The detection and prevention of fraud in coding, billing, and reimbursement
- EHR implementation in physician offices
- Designing, implementing, and evaluating systems and information technologies to enhance patient safety and improve the quality of healthcare

With these developments we see the need for both a larger work force and better-prepared, more highly skilled professionals.

Framing the challenges. To enable the HIM work force to meet the demands of the new environment, both in numbers and skill set, we must address:

- The aging of our current work force
- The planned retirement of HIM professionals during the next 15 years
- A modest growth, at best, of academic programs, with stable, or at times declining, enrollment in existing programs

We understand that not all current HIM professionals will transform their skills to an e-HIM future, thus further reducing the supply of available HIM professionals for the new environment. We have already seen movement from other disciplines to HIM roles, and this trend will continue if our profession cannot meet the demands, both in numbers and preparation.

Against this backdrop, we developed a strategic framework for the transformation of AHIMA over the next decade. The framework will drive AHIMA and hopefully spark frank and fruitful discussions. It consists of moving:

- From accommodation of health record content and format variances to advocacy for standardization
- From exclusivity to inclusive membership driven by role, aspiration, and interest
- From academic- to performance-based certification
- From autonomy and self-sufficiency to a working alliance with like-minded bodies
- From status quo to expanded ways of building association leadership
- From passive responsiveness to vendors to greater influence in system functionality

For years the association has addressed work force readiness primarily through influencing schools, certifying new professionals, and serving the needs of the members we certified. We believe that this focus represents far too conservative and passive a strategy to make the contributions we are capable of making and to lead not only the membership but the industry into an e-HIM world.

It is human choice that moves events. Our members will make the difference. Our success as leaders in this evolving new world will be a reflection of the tireless dedication and resilience of our members. Be the creative force that reshapes our profession. You are the architect of the next generation of HIM professionals. Every member counts.

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