

# Yours, Mine, and Ours

Save to myBoK

*by Margaret A. Skurka, MS, RHIA, CCS*

Newspaper columnists spend plenty of time writing about problems in our society, trying to understand who's responsible for social ills and how they can be fixed. How does this relate to AHIMA? I believe that we can ask the same type of questions about some of the problems our profession faces.

For example, who is responsible for the lack of awareness about our profession? Who is responsible for the salaries we know are too low for the work we perform? Who is responsible for the professional image that sometimes hurts rather than helps us?

No single entity is responsible for any of these issues. But the responsibility to secure our best and brightest future is yours and mine.

## How Can We Gain Recognition?

One of AHIMA's most exciting initiatives for 2000 is the image marketing campaign designed to promote and build awareness of the HIM profession. We are making significant progress as we prepare, with the initial rollout scheduled to start in July.

The goals of the image marketing campaign can be summed up in one word: jobs. The campaign aims to gain more recognition for the work we do today, such as being considered for higher-level positions and building and reinforcing the perception that HIM professionals are the right people to fill emerging health information roles. More specifically, the image marketing campaign is designed to:

- explain the unique skills we bring to the table
- increase awareness of our credentials
- communicate our leadership role and knowledge of health information issues

Initially, we want to reach employers—individuals who make critical budgetary and employment decisions in our workplaces. This summer we'll be working to reach employers in hospitals and integrated delivery systems, physician group practices, ambulatory care clinics and surgical centers, and managed care organizations.

Will this campaign fix all our image issues? No. Does it mean the individual member doesn't share some responsibility for the campaign? Of course not. This is the tip of the iceberg, and we need your help.

## Reflecting on Our Image

During March Team Talks, we shared some disturbing results of an AHIMA benchmarking study that provided the impetus for the campaign. We surveyed senior managers who make significant decisions about budgets and jobs in the four settings identified above about their perceptions of HIM professionals.

We found that the overall recognition of the field of HIM is good—83 percent of the respondents indicated they had heard of the HIM field. When we asked them to define their perceptions of the role of the HIM professional, we found that working with actual patient records and coding were high on the list. We were seen as having roles in information security and compliance.

But fewer than half of the senior managers indicated that HIM professionals are technology specialists. And most disturbing was the perception, held by 49 percent of those responding, that HIM professionals were clerical staff. In addition, 33 percent

viewed us as administrative, and only 18 percent viewed the HIM professional as managerial or executive. This is why we need to initiate change.

If I asked you to describe your best traits at your job, you might tell me that you are a visionary, that you take initiative, that you are analytical, and that you are a problem solver. Those are our skills, but employers don't see them. Our responsibility is to change that perception. The campaign alone won't do it—each one of us in the field reading this message needs to help.

It is our responsibility. We know employers turn to us for information about relevant health information issues. Because they want information, we have a unique opportunity to promote recognition of HIM knowledge and capabilities.

As a subset of image marketing, I'll add that AHIMA has made two new recruitment tools available. A brochure and a video have been distributed to educational programs and CSAs and are available to members at low cost. These materials are also available at AHIMA's Web site ([www.ahima.org](http://www.ahima.org)).

## Write Soon!

I appreciate all of your efforts. And I like hearing from the many of you who have already contacted me. Thanks to Kerry Daly, RHIA, who e-mailed me recently suggesting we all use our credentials in our day-to-day work. Use those credentials with your signature, and put them on your name tag or badge. Advertise them. "If you don't value them, no one else will. If your credential is worth working for and attaining, it is worth displaying. Recognition comes to those things that are made visible," Daly writes, and I agree.

In future columns, I'll share other great ideas from our members. I urge you all to take responsibility for continually promoting our profession. Our future will be better because of it.

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