e-HIM Revisited: Marking a Decade of Promoting Electronic HIM Change

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What a difference a decade makes.

This year marks the 10-year anniversary of the publication of AHIMA's landmark report, "A Vision of the e-HIM Future." Back then, AHIMA convened a group of industry, academic, and government representatives to identify what the emergence of electronic health records (EHRs) might look like in the future and what roles HIM professionals would play in the transition. At the time, the report served as a blueprint for the future. Now it offers a useful benchmark.

Looking at the articles for this month's issue, I can hardly believe how far we've come. In many ways, the industry has made tremendous progress, aided by rapid technological and legislative changes. But there's still plenty of work to be done, and the rapid pace of change means new details in the picture are popping up all the time.

Putting Data at the Forefront

In the early days of e-HIM, we heard many discussions about technology and work flow-important issues, to be sure. These days the conversation should be focused on the importance of data and turning data into useful information for decision making.

As speakers at AHIMA's Health Information Integrity Summit last fall pointed out, healthcare organizations must get serious about managing, controlling, and understanding data-one of their most important assets. Why is clinical, demographic, billing, and administrative data important?

Because it drives important decisions about care that benefit patients. Because data is an asset and organizations must treat it as such-keeping it confidential and ensuring that it is handled and released appropriately. That's our role as HIM professionals-to ensure that data is accessible, trusted, and timely in any care setting.

How can you get started? Convene the players in your organization and make sure everyone understands the importance of data. Audit data to identify and fix problems, just like the old quarterly audits of the paper record days. The goal is the best possible data available for making the best possible decisions.

e-HIM for 2013

This month's *Journal* articles offer a snapshot of the progress we've made on the transition to e-HIM.

As the adoption of patient portals continues to increase, driven by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services' stage 2 "meaningful use" EHR Incentive Program requirements, traditional HIM services such as release of information (ROI) may be re-imagined. Mark Crawford looks at how ROI is changing in "Rebooting Release of Information."

Johnathan Coleman notes that "not all protected health information is created equally," and providers have been struggling with the difficulties of ensuring appropriate sharing (or not sharing) of extra-sensitive health information as EHRs and HIEs become more prevalent. "Segmenting Data Privacy" describes how pilot projects used standards-based privacy metadata to address this challenge.

"Defining Health Informatics" discusses a much-debated question-and a relevant one today. Robert Campbell proposes that "health informatics is a systematic way to use information to improve the healthcare process" and offers specific examples of how HIM professionals can contribute.

By better managing our data, we turn it into knowledge-and come full circle. That was the goal 10 years ago, and it's still the goal today.

Article citation:

Gordon, Lynne Thomas. "e-HIM Revisited: Marking a Decade of Promoting Electronic HIM Change."
Journal of AHIMA 84, no.2 (February 2013): 21.

Article citation:

Gordon, Lynne Thomas. "e-HIM Revisited: Marking a Decade of Promoting Electronic HIM Change" *Journal of AHIMA* 84, no.2 (February 2013): 21.

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