Electronic health information management: the future is ours to embrace

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Introduction
As those who have been in the health information management (HIM) field for a number of years know, HIM is and forever will be a dynamic profession. One current trend that will have a major impact on HIM professionals is the transformation from a paper-based medical record to an electronic health record (EHR). In order to keep pace with the transformation and also succeed in the HIM field requires the ability to change and continuously acquire new skills and knowledge.

In 2002, the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) identified electronic health information management (e-HIM™) as one of its strategic focus areas for 2003. The goals for this issue that expand over a number of years are to:

• promote the migration from paper to an electronic health information infrastructure
• reinvent how institutional and personal health information and records are managed
• deliver measurable cost and quality results from improved information management (AHIMA 2003a).

To help meet these goals, AHIMA assembled a task force of industry leaders in early 2003. This group reviewed prior and ongoing AHIMA strategic initiatives and held a general brainstorming session on the driving forces in the health care, information management and technology industries. Three work groups were formed in order to develop a vision of the future state of health information and appropriate roles for the HIM professional. Finally, the task force determined vision statements for health information and HIM practice in 2010 and what future roles HIM professionals will have and the competencies HIM professionals will need. They also produced several recommendations for action items for AHIMA that are needed in order to attain these visions.

The following represents the task force findings, as well as the ongoing work AHIMA is doing towards meeting the goals of the e-HIM™ initiative.

Key findings
The task force found there were four factors affecting the future state of HIM (AHIMA 2003a).

An industry buffeted by external forces
Those forces were identified as:

• Economic factors. One such area the group identified was the complicated and often revised health care payment policies.
• Demographic changes. The group recognised the population as growing older, becoming more mobile and dispersed and living longer, therefore requiring extended treatment for multiple chronic problems.
• Need for standards. A cause of concern was the fact that few health information standards exist in the health care industry.

• Technology. Based on the state of technology, an issue identified regarding this external force was the fact that information management policies, practices and procedures needed improvement.
• Workforce concerns. The shortage of HIM professionals in the field was acknowledged.
• Consumer awareness. It was established that the patient is not only more involved in his or her care today, but also in ensuring the privacy, confidentiality and security of health information related to such care.
• Public health. The group affirmed the challenges related to community and global health problems.
• Other factors. An example of an additional issue included the work being done on evidence-based clinical practice guidelines.

An industry driven by information
The key issue addressed was the importance of data to health care.

Technology alone is not the answer
While technology has grown over the years, there are still problems with data content, accuracy and validity. Another issue included the cost factor of automation; that is, where will the money come from to pay for the implementation of an EHR?

Information management is critical
This factor addressed the importance of information management. The group identified the significance of being able to convert data into information and knowledge as well as other requirements, such as the capability to organise the information.

2010 vision statements for health information and HIM practice
Other outcomes of the task force included visions of health information and HIM practice in 2010. The task force first determined that HIM primarily focuses on a single entity — the consumer. Thus, the following 2010 health information vision was created:

The future state of health information is electronic, consumer-centered, comprehensive, longitudinal, accessible, and credible.

In the framework of this statement of the HIM environment, the practice of HIM in 2010 was examined. A vision statement for HIM practice was developed. It is stated below.

Health information management is the body of knowledge and practice that ensures the availability of health information to facilitate real-time health care delivery and critical health related decision-making for multiple purposes across diverse organizations, settings, and disciplines.
Future HIM roles and competencies

One other key finding of the task force was in the area of future roles and competencies of HIM professionals. The following are some examples of the future roles and competencies identified by the task force (AHIMA 2003a).

Roles

- business process engineer
- clinical research protocol designer and manager
- clinical vocabulary manager
- consumer advocate
- data analyst
- data/information broker
- data sets, nomenclature, and classification standards developer
- data miner
- data security, privacy, and confidentiality manager
- information systems designer
- work and data flow analyst.

Competencies

- analysing and synthesising qualitative and quantitative health information for various and diverse needs and audiences
- developing, designing, and implementing clinical vocabularies
- developing health information format and content standards to ensure the collection of complete, accurate, timely, and compliant health information
- establishing and implementing policies and standards for monitoring of data integrity, accuracy, validity, authenticity, and version control
- establishing and implementing policies, practices, and procedures governing all aspects of HIM
- establishing and implementing standards for privacy, security, and confidentiality of health information
- facilitating the concurrent use of health information for multiple purposes (such as for direct patient care, outcomes measurement and evaluation, wellness and prevention, research, public health and policy development)
- informing and educating consumers about health information issues
- leading business process redesign efforts
- providing the context to understand, analyse, and interpret health information
- translating and interpreting health information for consumers and their caregivers.

While, given the above, the outlook is very bright for the HIM profession, there may be areas where individuals need to gain new knowledge through additional coursework. To meet this need, AHIMA offers the following specialty advancement programs: Clinical Terminology Systems; Clinical Data Management; Health Care Compliance Analyst; Health Care Data Analytics; and Privacy.

In addition, the AHIMA’s Educational Strategy Committee (ESC) has been assessing what is needed to educate tomorrow’s HIM professionals for the roles that they will fill. The roles and competencies, along with specific recommendations related to educational programs stated in the e-HIM report, were used by the ESC to develop the HIM educational framework. The ESC has also created a program response plan that will assist educational programs in the revision of their curriculum and to help prepare faculty in the instruction of the new curriculum (Russel & Patena 2004). Revision of the model curricula for health information management associate, baccalaureate and master’s degree programs is being finalised.

e-HIM practice standards

Another outcome of the e-HIM Task Force’s recommendations was the formation of six workgroups. Last year, these groups were charged with developing practice standards that focus on areas that play an integral role in the transition from paper to electronic health records. The following issues were addressed:

- The complete medical record in a hybrid EHR environment. Three practice briefs — Managing the Transition, Managing Access, and Disclosure and Authorship of and Printing the Health Record — were created. The first brief includes a definition of the hybrid health record: A system with functional components that include both paper and electronic documents, and use both manual and electronic processes (AHIMA 2003b).
- Implementing e-signatures. This group developed a practice brief along with an appendix of state-by-state regulations pertaining to electronic signatures (AHIMA 2003c).
- Email as a provider-patient electronic communication medium and its impact on the EHR. Included in the deliverables for this group is a definition for provider-patient email along with four appendices, one of which summarises best practices for provider-patient email communication (AHIMA 2003d).
- Electronic document management as a component of the EHR. A standard created by this group was the largest of the six and contains 17 appendices along with the practice brief. Some of the valuable resources include specific form characteristics, bar code information and guidelines, and position summaries for indexing, preparation, quality control and scanning (AHIMA 2003e).
- Core data sets for the physician practice EHR. The practice brief for this standard is also quite extensive. Model core data sets were created by the work group for eight sample clinical work flows. The data sets are not specific to any particular specialty or size of physician practice (AHIMA 2003f).
- Speech recognition in the EHR. This practice brief provides HIM professionals with an increased understanding of how speech recognition works, the driving forces that are shaping the current and future applications of this technology, and the benefits and risks associated with both “front-end” and server-based use. A glossary of terms, as well as an illustration of workflow, tasks and skills, and best practices is also included (AHIMA 2003g).

Because of the success of these e-HIM workgroups, AHIMA has established additional ones for 2004. They are: Core Data Sets and Standards for the EHR,

Conclusion
In conclusion, e-HIM is the future of health information management and AHIMA has been instrumental in providing resources to assist HIM professionals with understanding what e-HIM means to them. Our members have started to recognize their place in this changing environment and are beginning to embrace the opportunities available by acquiring the skills and knowledge needed to fill the e-HIM positions.

Additional e-HIM initiative resources
A commitment to progress through e-HIM (Journal of AHIMA, January 2003).
New e-HIM initiative will reinvent HIM practice, support infrastructure (Journal of AHIMA, January 2003).
AHIMA mobilizes to meet the e-HIM call (AHIMA Advantage, February 2003).
HIM professionals vital in transition to e-HIM (AHIMA Advantage, September 2003).

References

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