



The HIM Role in Assisting Regional Extension Centers

The groundbreaking American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) includes a number of provisions that offer opportunities to HIM professionals. For example, health IT extension programs will be developed to help healthcare providers adopt, implement, and effectively use certified electronic health record (EHR) technology that allows for the electronic exchange and use of health information. The Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC) will establish an extension program to provide health IT assistance services to be carried out through the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).ⁱ

AHIMA and its members bring a unique set of qualifications to the table that would ensure and enable the successful adoption of EHRs. With a national focus on health information and the need for comprehensive and interoperable information technology across the country, AHIMA is qualified to shape and support the national agenda. AHIMA is involved in many initiatives to advance the role of HIM in informing clinical practice, developing best practices, improving data quality, facilitating information exchange, and helping healthcare organizations migrate to the EHR.ⁱⁱ

How HIM Can Help

Given the task that regional centers are trying to accomplish, HIM professionals can provide support in a number of ways:

- A. EHR and personal health record (PHR) knowledge and experience
- *Implementation* – HIM professionals have expertise and experience with EHR implementation lifecycle from workflow analysis and impact assessment to go-live support and post go-live support.
 - *Data use expertise* – HIM professionals are experts in the use of electronic data for coding; billing; release of information; privacy, security and confidentiality of health information; providing data for research, quality measurement, public reporting; clinical documentation improvement programs; and computer-assisted coding. HIM professionals are also committed to data integrity, particularly as it impacts patient care.
 - *Record custodians* – HIM professionals are trained to be and are considered to be the lawful “custodian of the record,” regardless of the media.
 - *Community education* – AHIMA has an established community outreach program (www.myphr.com) designed to raise awareness and educate the public about the importance of PHRs, patients’ rights regarding access to health information, and the benefits of EHRs.
 - *Education programs* – Schools accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Health Informatics and Information Management Education (CAHIIM) train HIM professionals to function in the “paper world,” the electronic world, and the “hybrid world” (paper AND electronic data comprising the legal health record). AHIMA has developed a program called

the “e-HIM virtual lab” that represents distance education opportunities in areas such as physician practice EHR solutions, clinical terminology systems, and a migration path to the EHR. CAHIIM- approved programs provide education for individuals who seek to acquire nationally accepted HIA/HIT credentials. These programs exist in universities and community colleges.

- *Advanced education* – Master’s level HIM and medical informatics programs are increasing in number, with many programs available online. Work is under way to develop a “fast track” for individuals who have experience in HIM but lack the formal education component. In addition, AHIMA’s Foundation supports research to advance knowledge in key EHR-related topics.
- *Credentials* – AHIMA is committed to maintaining the quality education-based credential while dedicated to meeting the work force demands that will be necessary for the implementation of EHRs for all Americans.

B. Subject matter expertise at the regional centers

- HIM professionals possess the expertise to provide assistance through the regional centers. At a minimum, this expertise includes an understanding of how health information is created, maintained, and used throughout an office or organization; guidelines and quality control procedures for coded data; privacy and confidentiality practices; and laws and regulations that impact the maintenance, use, and release of health information.
- AHIMA, in partnership with the American Medical Informatics Association, developed an EHR core competencies matrix tool for use by various educational and training programs, healthcare organizations and professions.ⁱⁱⁱ This tool can be used for several specific purposes, including:
 - 1) supporting the design of in-service and on-the-job training programs for the current work force who encounter and use the EHR
 - 2) serving as a reference for healthcare work force job descriptions
 - 3) planning professional development activities
 - 4) building specific professional competencies (after review and expansion by various health professions)
 - 5) developing new employee orientation programs
 - 6) improving formal health professional academic curricula.

To encourage development of models for training and academic education based on the EHR core competencies matrix tool, government policymakers are urged to consider funding programs to disseminate this fundamental information.

AHIMA and its members are uniquely qualified to support regional centers. By employing experienced HIM professionals, regional centers have the opportunity to access the profession’s robust knowledge and real-life experience that will further enhance adoption and implementation of certified health information technology.

ⁱ Cassidy, Bonnie. "A Call for HIM Action." *Journal of AHIMA*, April 20, 2009. Available at <http://journal.ahima.org/2009/04/20/a-call-for-him-action/#more-461>.

ⁱⁱ AHIMA Web site. Available at <http://www.ahima.org/about/about.asp>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Joint Work Force Taskforce. "Health Information Management and Informatics Core Competencies for Individuals Working with Electronic Health Records." 2008. Available at http://www.ahima.org/infocenter/whitepapers/workforce_2008.pdf