

Case Study XI. Threats to Data Integrity

The HIM professional has been employed for a large healthcare delivery system for over eight years and had developed strong collaborative relationships with various medical staff leaders. As part of this professional's job duties, s/he generates a quarterly quality metric report on patient care; the report includes such indicators as nosocomial infection rates, readmission rates, unplanned surgical returns, etc. This report includes the clinical quality metric from NQF for assessing emergency room throughput time. In preparation for an upcoming meeting, one of the medical staff (physician) leaders is reviewing the report prior to committee presentation and notes that one metric is higher than usual. This does not represent the ER Department in a favorable manner. The physician explains that this aberration was due to a shortage of physician personnel during this time and it not an accurate reflection of what is normal practice. The physician asks for the data item for the metric to be removed. When the meeting is held, the report has been manipulated to exclude the aforementioned metric.

1. *What was the AHIMA member's actions that resulted in an ethics violation being brought forward?*

It appears the HIM professional manipulated the report to exclude the quality metric that did not show the ER department in a favorable manner.

2. *What AHIMA Ethical Codes have been violated?*

The principles and guidelines this member possibly violated include:

Principle 2. Put service and the health and welfare of persons before self-interest and conduct oneself in the practice of the profession so as to bring honor to oneself, peers, and to the health information management profession.

Guideline 2.4. Ensure that the working environment is consistent and encourages compliance with the AHIMA Code of Ethics, taking reasonable steps to eliminate any conditions in the organizations that violate, interfere with, or discourage compliance with the code.

Principle 4. Refuse to participate in or conceal unethical practices or procedures and report such practices.

Guideline 4.1. Act in a professional and ethical manner at all times.

Guideline 4.8. Participate in, condone, or be associated with dishonesty, fraud and abuse, or deception.

Principle 6. Advocate for appropriate uses of information resources across the healthcare ecosystem.

Guideline 6.2. Educate stakeholders about the need to maintain data integrity and the potential impacts should data integrity not be maintained.

Guideline 6.3. Manipulate information systems to produce or display data and resulting information that is intentionally misleading.

3. *What is the potential harm to the organization or AHIMA as a result of the act?*

Loss of respect for and confidence in the HIM professional and the professional association and its members by the hospital administration and staff.

4. *What is the status of the AHIMA member's training, education, and awareness of the AHIMA Code of Ethics?*

S/He had been in the profession for at least eight years. As a HIM professional in accordance with the AHIMA Code of Ethics, all HIM professionals should be aware of the profession's mission, values and ethical principles, and practice in a manner consistent with them by acting honestly and responsibly, regardless of how long they have been in the profession.

Resolution: It is a reportable offense. The purposeful omission of data from the report is a violation of the above stated principles, and thereby reportable to the AHIMA Professional Ethics Committee for investigation and decision.