



## *HIM—A GREAT PROFESSION!*

### **Barbara P. Fuller, JD, RHIA**

#### *Serendipity Led Her to the HIM Profession, But Commitment Led Her to Make a Difference*

It was serendipity—an interest in healthcare and her mother's friend's daughter—that led Barbara P. Fuller to a career in health information management (HIM). She didn't even know what was involved in what was then called medical records until her third year in college, but over 30 years later she considers herself just plain lucky to have stumbled upon a profession that has been fulfilling, challenging and rewarding.

HIM professionals maintain, collect and analyze the data that doctors, nurses and other healthcare providers rely on to deliver quality healthcare. They are experts in managing patient health information and medical records, administering computer information systems and coding the diagnosis and procedures for healthcare services provided to patients. HIM professionals work throughout the healthcare industry including hospitals, physician offices and clinics, long-term care facilities, insurance companies, government agencies and home care providers.

"HIM offers an open door to an exciting career that can meet almost any need for an individual who wants to be in some aspect of healthcare," says Fuller, who is credentialled as a Registered Health Information Administrator (RHIA). "The field is a good choice for individuals interested in the administrative aspect of healthcare delivery, technology, medical legal issues, analytical systems analysis, systems design and management, and many other challenging aspects of the healthcare system."

Fuller's career is evidence of the broad scope of opportunities HIM has to offer. During her career she has moved from medical records director at a tuberculosis sanatorium to Acting Chief of the Policy,

Education and Outreach Branch of the National Human Genome Research Institute, which oversees for the National Institutes of Health the international research program designed to construct detailed genetic and physical maps of the human genome.

In her role at the National Human Genome Research Institute, Fuller is directly responsible for policy initiatives for the ethical and legal aspects of genetics research. Her branch is also involved in developing educational initiatives and designing outreach opportunities for diverse segments of the population.

Fuller prepared for her current role by earning a law degree, but feels that her legal training combined with her HIM background is what has made the difference.

"An HIM background has enabled me to be successful in my work because it has provided me with a practical insight into how all health information is managed and, consequently, how genetic information is handled," she says. "The lesson that I have learned is that the HIM profession is transportable to a wide variety of environments – even when we don't expect it."

It is a lesson she passes on to those interested in entering the field.

"It begins with an interest in helping people, an interest in healthcare and basic people skills," says Fuller. "But with commitment, hard work and a eagerness to learn, the field can take you in an infinite amount of directions. I'm living proof of that."

