



Imagine Your Possibilities

Connect your skills in healthcare, business, and technology with a career in health information management (HIM).

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Katie Baird

Age: 22

Nazareth, PA

*Senior HIM Major at the
University of Pittsburgh*

Imagine Your Possibilities!

The path to health information management (HIM) doesn't always follow a straight line.

"I am really excited [about] the progress being made in this field. It's a field that's not well-known...but it should be."

Katie Baird was a science major at the University of Pittsburgh, but while chemistry was interesting, it never felt like a career she'd be happy in.

Coincidentally, her roommate studied HIM, and had terrific things to say about the program and profession. With a little research, Baird learned about HIM's diversity, its solid pay scale, and the growing demand for professionals. She found the major she was looking for.

The HIM program wasn't all books and exams; students got a taste of the working world. Baird quickly found herself out of the classroom and into observing rotations at several hospitals and healthcare facilities for her program requirements.

She'll soon graduate with a Bachelor of Science in Health Information Management, and will pursue a job in implementation consulting. As healthcare facilities convert their paper health records into electronic health records (EHRs), Baird wants to be a part of the transition. Many healthcare facilities will make the switch to digital in the immediate future. That means plenty of work for HIM professionals.

"I like that you are working as a part of a team and...with multiple aspects (of a facility) in HIM," she said.

An HIM consulting job will bring a sense of accomplishment Baird wasn't sure she could have by rattling test-tubes in a lab. HIM wasn't her initial career choice, but now she can't imagine doing anything else.

"When I started... I saw that for the first time I was taking courses that would help me in the future. I saw there was a wide range of careers—a salary I would be happy with, and a bunch of different opportunities for me—and that is always a good thing to see when you are a student."

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Explore Your Possibility!

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Aisha Chaudhry

Age: 22

Chicago, IL

Recent Bachelor of Science in Health Information Management graduate from the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Explore Your Possibility!

Aisha Chaudhry is an HIM advocate. Like many, she was originally in the dark about health information management (HIM), but after earning her degree Chaudhry now does her best to spread the word about her new profession. She describes the HIM major as a “hidden gem” that, when discovered, offers many possibilities for a satisfying career.

Nonclinical healthcare always interested Chaudhry, but when she first entered college she chose to major in psychology. The large lecture halls made

her feel faceless and disconnected from her major, and she gradually questioned her motives. Did she really want to study psychology? What could she do after graduation?

Searching for other healthcare majors, she came across HIM. Her first class pleasantly surprised her.

“Once I entered I [thought], ‘This is completely not what I thought it was... You get a little bit of everything: business, finance, [and] a little bit of management, in our curriculum.’”

The small class sizes were a nice change for Chaudhry. “You have more room to grow and stand out,” she said. Fewer students in the program meant less competition in the workforce and classroom. Also, she says, HIM professionals are a tight-knit group, making job connections easy to score and help with HIM questions just a phone call away.

HIM involves more than managing a health records department. Information technology is a growing area of HIM, and Chaudhry looks forward to entering the field. And the training isn’t just academic—all students are sent into the field to shadow working HIM professionals.

“[HIM] is a multifaceted degree. You’re trained in aspects from various areas, and you can branch to any area from there.”

Exposure to such a diverse array of professions, Chaudhry says, can help anyone find a rewarding niche in HIM. “The degree is flexible. You don’t graduate with one degree and [discover] only one type of job out there for you,” she said. Chaudhry is preparing to return to the University of Illinois at Chicago to get her Master of Public Health Informatics. Once she’s in the working world, she wants to help implement electronic health record (EHR) systems in hospitals.

As a personal project, Chaudhry plans to promote HIM until it’s “a household name.” Till then, it’s her, and thousands of other HIM professionals’, “hidden gem.”

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You Are the Future!

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Sarah Keppen

Age: 25

Sioux Falls, SD

Seeking a Bachelor of
Science in Health
Information

Administration, Dakota
State University

You Are the Future!

With seven physicians in her family, Sarah Keppen felt healthcare was her destiny; but directly working with patients, needles, and other messy details never appealed to her. While talking with her pediatrician mother about healthcare careers, she learned about health information management (HIM). As someone who loved healthcare's details, Keppen found HIM intriguing. She could still absorb medical terminology and physiology while tinkering with databases and IT applications. As behind-the-scenes healthcare work, HIM was a perfect fit.

"[You see] the interesting parts of working in health-care. "The data and information...the medical charts, the histories, the things you get to see and hear about medicine and patients and their life stories. Working with that is what interests me."

Keppen is currently studying at Dakota State University. Originally entering DSU to get her Associate of Science in HIM, Keppen was inspired to pursue the higher degree. This exposed her to a wider array of classes—not all HIM-oriented. She believes this will pay off in the future.

"The more knowledge you have on broad topics makes you a better HIM professional as a whole."

Keppen dove deep into her program, joining the HIM Club, which hosts educational and social events for prospective and current HIM program students. Now, as club president, Keppen helps organize HIM-centric projects that look great on her resume.

Keppen didn't want to wait to enter the HIM field. She currently works part-time as a file clerk at a local Madison hospital. The experience, along with several internships, has brought HIM alive and convinced her that she made the right choice.

"I pretty much knew from the moment I got into this that this is what I wanted to do," she said. "It helps knowing I made the right decision... I have never looked back."

Finding a job shouldn't be difficult. Her degree prepares her for a number of HIM careers—a surprising number, she says. HIM, she feels, offers something for everyone.

While one job may not be the right fit for you, explains Keppen, another might be perfect, because the HIM professional has a background of multiple disciplines.

"You are drawing from science, healthcare, legal issues, business, and computer technology issues. There is something out there for you in HIM."

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Are You the Solution?

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Adriana Lukic

Age: 38

Chicago, IL

Seeking a Master of Science in Health Informatics at the University of Illinois at Chicago

Are You the Solution?

Adriana Lukic loves computers, but she wanted a profession where she could also directly help people. She wasn't sure she could pair them together. After acquiring a Bachelor of Science in Computer Information Systems, she designed and maintained networks and databases for UPS and Motorola. But after a few years the work became stale, and she longed for a job where she could look after others' well-being.

Lukic was interested in healthcare but not direct patient contact. Attending a career fair at the University of Illinois at Chicago, she was thrilled when an advisor said she could satisfy her interests in health informatics.

"I always wanted to get into the medical industry. I just didn't know how I would do it with computers. And then...I found this career..."

Not having a background in healthcare is no obstacle to entering the health information field. Information technology is a vital part of the health information management (HIM). The healthcare world is currently switching from paper to electronic health records (EHR), and facilities need tech-savvy employees to design, implement, and operate information technology systems. IT skills are in high demand in the healthcare field.

A year into her program, Lukic finds her classes challenging, interesting, and set on a firm IT foundation—just the sort of profession she was looking for.

Don't settle for a job you're not passionate about, she warns. Prospective students should read up on health informatics, talk to current students and professionals, and see for themselves if the program is a good fit. Take the step and follow your passion, Lukic said, even if it means first heading back into the classroom.

"My dream job is something where I could help the community itself, which is part of why I went into the health industry," she said.

Health informatics is a developing field focused on using technology to improve the operations of healthcare facilities and their employees. Lukic soon learned how her health informatics classes can directly improve patient care.

"It is a challenge, because it is still new," she says. "So there is a lot to discover and a lot to learn—and I like that about the field."

"My dream job is something where I could help the community itself, which is part of why I went into the health industry,"

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Know Your Potential

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Tiria Miller

Age: 22

Philadelphia, PA

Senior seeking her Associate of Science in Health Information Technology from Gwynedd-Mercy College

Know Your Potential

Tiria Miller was born to code. Coding medical information takes a special mindset. A coder must be sharp on details, grounded in training, and smart enough to piece together complex medical terminology to complete the puzzle of patient records.

Miller says she embodies these personal characteristics, which will land her a career in health information management (HIM). With the degree she earns from Gwynedd-Mercy College, Miller feels she'll have the diploma, and the mindset, needed to excel as a medical coding professional.

Miller originally entered college to study radiology, but changed her mind after talking to an enthusiastic HIM student who explained the profession's benefits.

When Miller first heard about medical coding, she expected to enjoy the work. Medical coding is the process of assigning standard numeric representations to clinical documentation, which simplifies medical billing and data research. Her instincts were right, and she embraced her coding classes from the start. She remembers thinking, "Wow, this is something that's challenging, but which I feel like I could excel in."

"I'm a person who loves to multitask, and I love when I'm challenged with deadlines," she said. "After [some online reading] and talking to students who were in the program... it made me think, 'Okay, do I need to make a change? Is radiology really for me?'"

"If you're looking for an area in healthcare that can open doors...HIM and the HIT program are it," she said. "The range of experiences, the range of jobs—it's so big, you won't be the type of person [holding] the same job for 30 years."

After she graduates, Miller plans to earn the Certified Coding Associate (CCA) credential, which will make her even more marketable to coding employers. Her next goal is to get a job coding at a local hospital, and then head back to Gwynedd-Mercy College to earn her Bachelor of Health Science in HIM.

The HIM program gave Miller skills that translated directly into the working world. During her clinical internship Miller realized how much HIM knowledge she soaked up throughout her years in the program. "Everything I learned throughout the program was there, [and] it was working, I was actually putting my education into the real world."

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Exceed Your Potential!

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Luke Thompson Superior, WI

Senior at the College of
St. Scholastica, Duluth, MN

Exceed Your Potential!

Luke Thompson began his college studies by preparing for a career in physical therapy (PT). His older sister, one of Luke's role models, was studying health information management (HIM) at the College of St. Scholastica. Once she explained the field to him, Luke decided to pursue a career in HIM as well. "When my sister showed me HIM, I fell in love," Luke said about his decision to switch careers.

Luke felt HIM would enable him to "indirectly help patients seek and get better care." He also switched academic concentrations after hearing about the need for more males in a generally female-dominated HIM field.

Following in his sister's footsteps, Luke enrolled in the HIM program at the College of St. Scholastica in Duluth, MN. Now a senior, Luke finds many beneficial reasons for studying HIM. Among them is the fact that the field is dynamic and continues to change.

"It keeps me on my toes," he explained.

Luke has found limitless opportunities in HIM, and enjoys a field spanning multiple concentrations.

"The implementation of EHRs will be a big factor in the next few years."

Nearing the end of his HIM program and preparing to enter the working world, Luke would like to eventually become the director of HIM at a large hospital. His broader career expectations include continuous exposure to "never-ending knowledge" from the constant developments and evolutions the HIM field will see in the near future. For example, Luke discussed the importance of health information technology in Obama's stimulus package.

"The implementation of EHRs will be a big factor in the next few years," Luke explained. He's looking forward to being involved in HIM at such a turning point.

Having been inspired by another HIM student, Luke advises others not to limit themselves to one specific job. "Go out there and find anything and everything," he added. He's certainly not limiting himself. When asked where he sees himself in the next 20 years he replied, "The CEO of AHIMA." If that doesn't work out, he explained, he'd be equally happy as a college professor.

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