

Managing Health Information in Time of Change

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The practice of health information management (HIM) has many facets and HIM professionals can wear many hats. An HIM professional can be found within an organization as the director of HIM, privacy or security officer, health data analyst, electronic health record (EHR) implementation specialist, coding manager, or even a C-level executive position. The list goes on and on. Regardless of the area of expertise, an HIM professional practices or the level of their experience, one common goal remains: “To optimally achieve the accuracy, availability, and protection of health information for all.”¹

In the last few years, the healthcare industry has seen unprecedented changes. In 2004, President George W. Bush signed an executive order mandating that all Americans have EHRs in 10 years. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) followed suit in 2009, incentivizing the transition to EHRs and promoting the overall adoption of health information technology (HIT), including the electronic exchange of health information. Another critical outcome of 2009 was the publication of the final rule mandating the coding system change from ICD-9-CM to ICD-10-CM/PCS. Below are brief descriptions of these changes—the most critical changes to the practice of HIM in decades.

ICD-10-CM/PCS

Simply put, coding classification is the application of specific codes to every healthcare encounter, which in turn provides reimbursement for services rendered. These code sets have other important uses as well, such as measuring healthcare quality and tracking, and responding to public health threats. The current ICD-9-CM coding system has been in use for over 30 years and no longer has the capacity to reflect or capture the practice of medicine today. ICD-10-CM/PCS becomes effective October 1, 2013, and is a critical, but long overdue, change needed to bring the United States up to speed with today’s medical and technological codes, and align it with the rest of the world.

Electronic Health Record and Health Information Exchange (HIE)

ARRA is a law that brought HIT to the forefront and provides monetary incentives to eligible providers and organizations for the adoption of EHRs. More importantly, ARRA promotes and drives the efforts of HIE—the ability for providers and organizations to electronically interchange consumer health data for the continuum of care. Together, EHRs and HIEs strive for optimal consumer outcomes by capturing and transmitting data to streamline the accuracy of information provided and increase its availability for treatment and diagnosis purposes.

Data Stewardship

In an industry striving to be more electronic every day, the need for data stewardship is essential. Data stewardship is defined as “the responsibilities and accountabilities associated with managing, collecting, viewing, storing, sharing, disclosing, or otherwise making use of personal health information.” Due to their electronic formats, EHRs and HIEs pose challenges for data stewardship and the overall management of health information. There are different risks to consider, such as how to ensure only authorized individuals have access, and maintaining the integrity of the information. Whereas there’s only one physical paper record, an EHR or HIE can be accessed simultaneously from many different locations.

ICD-10-CM/PCS, EHRs, HIEs, and data stewardship are all components of managing consumer health information. Whether it is a classification code from ICD-10-CM/PCS or a lab result from an EHR or HIE, consumer health information must be protected at all times. The privacy and security of health information is equally important and plays an integral part in the overall confidentiality of that information. Privacy and security practices have also been impacted by changes in law and industry needs, and HIM professionals are poised to lead the change. Keep an eye out for best practices and guidance tips as AHIMA focuses on privacy and security in April 2012!

Notes/References

1. AHIMA. Pocket Glossary of Health Information Management and Technology. Chicago, IL: AHIMA, 2010, p. 97.

Quiz

1. ICD-10-CM/PCS can more accurately capture and reflect the practice of medicine today.
 - a. True
 - b. False
2. ICD-9-CM will become effective on October 1, 2013.
 - a. True
 - b. False
3. Which positions might an HIM professional hold?
 - a. Privacy Officer
 - b. Coding Manager
 - c. Chief Operating Officer
 - d. All the above
4. Which statement is true?
 - a. ARRA provides monetary incentives for EHR adoption.
 - b. ARRA mandated EHRs in 10 years.
 - c. ARRA mandated ICD-10-CM/PCS.
 - d. ARRA will make data stewardship easier to manage.
5. When is AHIMA’s Privacy and Security Month?
 - a. March 2012
 - b. April 2012
 - c. May 2012
 - d. June 2012