



news

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HIM Professionals Advocate for Increased Access to Information, Patient Safety

AHIMA members tackle opioid epidemic, patient matching on Capitol Hill

WASHINGTON, D.C. – March 20, 2018 – Members of the [American Health Information Management Association \(AHIMA\)](#) called on Congress to support legislation to ensure healthcare professionals have access to their patients’ entire medical history – a move that could help address the opioid crisis in the United States while maintaining the privacy and security of patient information. AHIMA members met with Congressional leaders in Washington, D.C. during the 2018 AHIMA Advocacy Summit.

Two current Congressional bills, House of Representatives bill 3545, the Overdose Prevention and Patient Safety Act, and Senate bill 1850, Protecting Jessica Grubb's Legacy Act, aim to turn the tide on the opioid crisis and prevent more patient overdoses by providing physicians with information about a patient’s addiction treatment—detail that is currently prohibited from sharing with physicians without explicit patient consent—while strengthening privacy laws. This appropriate sharing of substance abuse disorder information will ensure patients receive the integrated care they need.

H.R. 3545 aligns the 42 CFR Part 2 regulation, which limits release of substance use disorder treatment records without a patient’s consent, with a portion of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), which allows healthcare professionals to obtain this information when it directly affects their provision of care. The proposed new rule finds a middle ground, modernizing privacy protocols to maximize quality care.

“We are facing one of the nation’s deadliest substance abuse epidemics, and it’s time for the laws put into place decades ago to reflect the needs of the industry today,” said Pamela Lane, MS, RHIA, vice president, government relations. “AHIMA’s members consistently work to find the balance between two important priorities in healthcare – access to information and the privacy of health records. Today, urging support of these bills, we are working to achieve both.”

During the Summit, AHIMA also continued advocating for a nationwide patient matching strategy by requesting Congress lift the current ban that restrains the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) from working with the industry on creating a system for seamless patient identification. AHIMA previously advocated for the need for a unique national patient identifier during its Advocacy Summit in 2016 and continued to focus on patient identification issues in the 2017 call for lifting the current funding ban prohibiting HHS’ collaboration with industry in finding a patient matching strategy.

“While the sheer amount of information within hospitals and health systems continues to flourish, one aspect should never change – the patient is the priority,” Lane said. “This is why we must make the shift toward a patient matching strategy that ensures that the correct patient is matched with the correct information, every time.” AHIMA’s advocacy initiatives began Monday, March 19, with the 2018 AHIMA Advocacy Summit. AHIMA members reached out to legislators on Capitol Hill on Tuesday, March 20.

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About AHIMA

The American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) represents more than 103,000 health information professionals in the United States and around the world. AHIMA is committed to promoting and advocating for best practices and effective standards in health information and to actively contributing to the development and advancement of health information professionals worldwide. AHIMA is advancing informatics, data analytics, and information governance to achieve the goal of providing expertise to ensure trusted information for healthcare. www.ahima.org