

### Case Study III. Adherence to AHIMA Code of Ethics/Professionalism

The new HIM director recently relocated from another state. Immediately upon her employment, her staff begins to note irregular behavior. It seems that the new director is carrying out activities that are not consistent with the organization's culture and the AHIMA Code of Ethics, and which possibly may be illegal. The activities include reimbursing herself out of petty cash for questionable expenditures, using the organization's technology for the business records of her handmade jewelry business disregarding the organization's policy prohibiting such use, hiring individuals who are friends or relatives, submitting expense vouchers for attendance at meetings where no one recalls her in attendance, and optimizing codes for improved reimbursement. Is there an ethical violation, dilemma, or concern?

In this scenario, there is an ethical concern. Clearly the activities of the new HIM director do not reflect the values and inherent ethical responsibilities of an HIM professional. The activities relate to actions taken for personal gain and potentially fraudulent activity. As a result, harm to HIM director's organization and AHIMA by virtue of her membership association may ensue.

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

It appears that the act would be personal financial gain for the HIM director and possibly fraudulent activity.

2. *What AHIMA Ethical Code has 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 themselves in the practice of the profession so as to bring honor to themselves, their peers, and to the health information management profession.

Guideline 2.1. Act with integrity, behave in a trustworthy manner, elevate service to others above self-interest, and promote high standards of practice in every setting.

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

Guideline 4.8. A health information management professional shall not participate in, condone, or be associated with dishonesty, fraud and abuse, or deception.

Principle 5. Use technology, data, and information resources in the way they are intended to be used.

Guideline 5.1. Use healthcare employer technology resources within the confines of organizational policies.

Guideline 5.2. Ensure all data and resulting information accessed and derived from healthcare technology resources are not used outside of the scope of the job.

3. *What is the potential harm to the AHIMA organization and the AHIMA member if the organization is made aware of the ethical violation?*

Multiple harm is evident in this scenario. The misuse of funds if not addressed could harm the hospital's reputation. It could be misconstrued that the hospital supports the director's questionable coding practices and the hospital's reputation could be harmed since they hired this person. AHIMA is also harmed as the person acting unethically is considered to be an AHIMA member and possibly credentialed by AHIMA.

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

Though not specified, it is assumed that the HIM director is both credentialed and a member. She should be aware of the Code of Ethics. Each year, members must agree to abide by the Code of Ethics when joining or renewing AHIMA membership.

Resolution: At minimum, education and training on the Code of Ethics should be undertaken with this member. If inappropriate funds were taken by the member, that would be fraudulent activity and should be considered strongly when evaluating ethical conduct and any further action to be taken. At a minimum, the employer organization will need to consider what action to take with this staff member.