

## Case Study I. Privacy/Confidentiality

Mary, a 20-year veteran of the HIM department began her career as a nightshift file clerk when an innovative tertiary care center built a sister facility in her community. She has long been a strong supporter of the facility where she works, sharing her enthusiasm with friends and family by telling remarkable stories about her experiences, promotions within the department, and even about some notable patients. Recently promoted to supervisor over the EMR coordinators, she is clearly proud of this latest accomplishment in her career at the facility. During a lunch break, she has a chance encounter with a longtime benefactor who happens to be a well-known entertainer. This celebrity benefactor has also been a patient at the facility. Mary is so excited about meeting this media icon that she takes his photograph with her cell phone. She then shares the photos with her coworkers, and the next day posts them on her Facebook page. When the CEO of the facility learns of this, she contacts Mary's director. Is there an ethical violation, dilemma, or concern?

In this particular scenario, there is definitely a concern. Any patient, regardless of and particularly of this stature, has the right to heal in an unobtrusive manner. This patient may feel that there is no place left to go to recover in peace. Although it is exciting to meet celebrities, it is also paramount that HIM practitioners remain professional and respect the individual's right to privacy.

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

While this act may have been unintentional, the results may have inadvertently caused harm.

2. *What is the potential harm to the organization as a result of the act?*

There may be harm to employer both financially (since this is a benefactor) and reputation-wise.

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

In this scenario, the individual may or may not be a member of AHIMA, as it is clear that she is noncredentialed. Awareness of the Code of Ethics may be limited.

4. *What is the history of the AHIMA member's performance within the Association?*

The individual clearly has accomplishments relative to her profession, but there may be no direct affiliation with AHIMA.

5. *What AHIMA Ethical Code has been violated?*

The principles and guidelines this member possibly violated include:

Principle I. Advocate, uphold, and defend the individual's right to privacy and the doctrine of confidentiality in the use and disclosure of information.

Resolution: Each individual organization will have to shape policies, practices, and procedures consistent with its culture. For some, this means zero tolerance for any related activities, because this professional is in a position in which she should have known. For others, the approach may be that since this is an excellent employee with a stellar history, she should be redirected via education and training. Perhaps mandatory completion of a self-assessment tool such as this one, reading some literature on the subject, and adding routine ethical educational topics to the internal educational employee records are in order.