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Interoperability and the Pediatric “Name Game”

Presenters at AHIMA Convention call for newborn identification standards

LOS ANGELES – Oct. 9, 2017 – Patient identification remains a hot topic as health information management (HIM) professionals continue to navigate how to best achieve interoperability in an ever-evolving healthcare ecosystem. While the United States still works to implement a national patient identifier, a proposed solution to one specific population – newborn patients – is being presented today at the [American Health Information Management Association’s \(AHIMA\) 89th Annual Convention and Exhibit](#) in Los Angeles.

At birth, newborns do not have government-issued identification such as a Social Security Number (SSN)—the primary means of identifying patients—which compromises interoperability. The issue was highlighted in the presentation, “Addressing Interoperability Challenges in Pediatric Populations Using Informatics,” presented by representatives from the Children’s Hospital Association (CHA) Health Information Management Group, the national voice of more than 220 children’s hospitals and aims to advance child health through innovation in the quality, cost and delivery of care.

“Hospitals and healthcare systems identify newborns in different ways, which can result in inconsistent health records,” said Katherine Lusk, MHSM, RHIA, FAHIMA, chief HIM and exchange officer at Children’s Health in Dallas and presenting member of the CHA. “The solution lies in the creation of pediatric patient naming standards, and we are delighted to have this platform at AHIMA’s convention today to formally share the need for standardizing this process and avoiding future errors in patient identification in this vulnerable patient population.”

According to Lusk, without this standard, interoperability and the delivery of the right care to the right patient can be compromised. A standard identifier is necessary at the time of birth so proper care can be provided to that child in the future.

Further complicating the issue, newborns are often given a temporary name by the hospital, such as Baby Boy A, as the parents decide on the baby’s legal name, which may or may not be updated at the time of discharge. These situations potentially cause risks in patient

identification, as it is unclear which name should be used on the patient's record. When a newborn is part of a multiple birth, meaning they are a twin, triplet, etc., the risk becomes even higher, as SSNs are issued with sequential digits, hospital temporary names tend to be similar and given names can also have fraternal similarities.

To help alleviate confusion, CHA recommends the following naming standards to ensure consistency at all children's hospitals and health systems:

- Last name = Mother's last name
- First name = Boy or Girl
- Middle Name = Mother's first name
- Multiple Births should include 1, 2, 3 or A, B, C with the first name.

"For children of a multiple birth delivery, the issue can be magnified, as it can be difficult to identify which children was Baby Boy A, B, and so on," said Dorothy O'Hagan, MNLM, RHIA, CCS, director of HIM and interoperability at Rady Children's Hospital-San Diego and presenting member of CHA. "In our research, we honed in on the nuances of this patient population to propose the most accurate way to capture this information."

Nationally speaking, the addition of a standardized naming process in the newborn population will save health systems money and most importantly ensure the safety of these new patients, according to the presenters.

"As accurate patient identification continues to be a key area of focus for AHIMA, it is inspiring to see the CHA emphasizing the importance of standards for pediatric patients," said AHIMA interim CEO Pamela Lane, MS, RHIA. "As health information management professionals continue to advance a national standard, the quality of care we provide to these patients will demonstrate our goal."

Lusk and O'Hagan's presentation is one of several addressing interoperability and informatics in HIM. For details on additional presentations on this topic and others, visit the [educational tracks page](#) of the AHIMA Convention & Exhibit website.

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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