



news

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## ***Journal of AHIMA* Explores Importance of Contact Tracers**

**CHICAGO – June 4, 2020** – Many public health experts have said that until a vaccine or treatment for COVID-19 is available, contacting people who have been near someone who tests positive for the virus will be an important tactic to slow its spread. Matt Schlossberg, managing editor of the *Journal of AHIMA*, examines contact tracing in his article, "[The Disease Detectives](#)" in the magazine's June issue.

What type of skills or background does one need to be an effective contact tracer?

Schlossberg writes, "Picture a health information professional, privacy expert, virus detective, social worker, crisis counselor, and therapist rolled into one, and you are close to understanding what is expected of a contact tracer in the age of COVID-19."

With the US estimated to need 100,000 to 300,000 contact tracers in the coming months, Schlossberg looks at why health information professionals make for capable contact tracers and tells the story of a health information professional, Laurie Peters, RHIA, CCS, CHPS, working as a contact tracer with Native American populations in North Dakota.

Peters said the questions she asks a person who test positive include, "Do you have any symptoms? If so, when did they start? Are you self-isolating? Have you traveled anywhere? Who have you been in contact with today and yesterday and the day before that and the day before that—at work, at home, in public?"

Schlossberg highlights the daunting nature of being a contact tracer. It's an emotional job, as people share intimate details of their lives, and contact tracers are tasked with making sure the people they're in touch with are able to persevere through self-isolation. While it may be challenging for health information professionals accustomed to working with data to find themselves engaging with people on such an interpersonal level, AHIMA CEO Wylecia Wiggs Harris, PhD, CAE, said she thinks they make for excellent contact tracers.

“With their background in data management, it only makes sense that health information professionals are serving their communities as contact tracers,” said Harris. “I’m proud of how they have stepped up during this pandemic. Health information professionals are able to help ensure data is collected, structured, applied, and safeguarded properly.”

Read “[The Disease Detectives](#)” at [Journal.AHIMA.org](http://Journal.AHIMA.org). Journalists who would like to interview an AHIMA expert about contact tracing can contact [Mike Bittner](#), AHIMA’s media and communications manager.

Other articles in the June issue of the *Journal of AHIMA* look at COVID-19 through the lens of [coding teams](#), [field hospitals](#) and [social determinants of health](#).

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## **About AHIMA**

AHIMA is a global nonprofit association of health information (HI) professionals. AHIMA represents professionals who work with health data for more than one billion patient visits each year. AHIMA’s mission of empowering people to impact health drives our members and credentialed HI professionals to ensure that health information is accurate, complete, and available to patients and providers. Our leaders work at the intersection of healthcare, technology, and business, and are found in data integrity and information privacy job functions worldwide.