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‘Just Begun’ to See Health IT Promise, says DeSalvo

National coordinator stresses importance of data governance; AHIMA president shares personal story of critical health information management

SAN DIEGO – Sept. 30, 2014 – Access to complete and accurate health information that can be exchanged between health systems is critical to improved care, said Karen DeSalvo, MD, MPH, MSc, the national coordinator for health information technology.

DeSalvo spoke Monday at the American Health Information Management’s (AHIMA) Annual Convention and Exhibit in San Diego, the largest meeting of health information management professionals in the United States.

Noting that health information is pulled together from several different sources including physician information and medical devices, DeSalvo said her office is refreshing the Federal Health IT strategic plan to address changing technology and set priorities for the next five years.

The plan, which will look at advancing information beyond electronic health records, will be available for public comment over the winter.

While highlighting successes in EHR adoption and Meaningful Use, DeSalvo stressed that as technology keeps changing, the industry must evolve to keep up and take advantage of new opportunities.

“We’ve only just begun to see the power and promise health IT will bring to healthcare,” DeSalvo said.

An important part of the interoperability puzzle is governing data, and the biggest challenge the industry faces is learning how to do so, DeSalvo said.

“We cannot wait to get this done. In every other area of life consumers are able to get information quickly, this should also apply to their health information,” DeSalvo said. “We have all of this data coming at us from different directions and we need to make sure we’re capturing all of it.”

DeSalvo encouraged the audience to give ONC feedback on the strategic plan when it is released. "It's important that this plan is not just ONC's plan," she said. "We want to partner with the private sector to create the best solutions that will improve healthcare outcomes."

HIM professionals are on the front lines of the focus on information governance and data analytics, said AHIMA CEO Lynne Thomas Gordon, MBA, RHIA, CAE, FACHE, FAHIMA.

"As technology evolves, so does the HIM professionals' role in promoting the integrity of health information and turning that information into health intelligence," Thomas Gordon said. "HIM professionals will continue to be a key partner in moving this initiative forward to improve patient safety and care."

Enhancing the message about the importance of accurate and complete health information, AHIMA President/Chair Angela Kennedy, EdD, MBA, RHIA, shared her daughter's recent cystic fibrosis diagnosis, and said she knew having the complete picture of her daughter's health records - from the cradle to the present - was essential to helping her get well.

With her knowledge of HIM, Kennedy said she was able to gather her daughter's medical records, including records from doctor visits and lab results, and discovered that one critical piece of information was incorrect. While she was able to correct it, Kennedy said the experience gave her a new appreciation of the role of health information as a consumer and encouraged HIM professionals to lead the way in raising awareness.

"As HIM professionals, we understand how critical complete and accurate information is to patient care," Kennedy said. "My family's story is an example of this. I encourage all of you to create opportunities within your community to educate consumers on the importance of keeping records of their personal health information," Kennedy said.

While describing advances in medical technology, Eric Topol, MD, cardiologist and chief academic officer, Scripps Health, stressed that medicine will become more individualized, with data captured by mobile devices used to track vital signs and diagnosing conditions and diseases.

This additional data will need to be analyzed and kept secure, making data governance in healthcare increasingly important, Topol said, adding that HIM professionals will lead the way.

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About AHIMA

The American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) represents more than 71,000 educated health information management and health informatics professionals in the United States and around the world. AHIMA is committed to promoting and advocating for high quality research, best practices and effective standards in health information and to actively contributing to the development and advancement of health information professionals worldwide. AHIMA's enduring goal is quality healthcare through quality information.

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