

Case Study VII. Compliance

An HIM graduate with two years of experience is employed by a large academic healthcare center and is placed in a management position over the Analysis and Chart Completion area. Using the reports generated by the IS Department to calculate the chart delinquency rate, she determines some “incomplete charts” are over 30 days old. The charts are in a pending file and are not counted in the total number of delinquent records. If these records were counted, the delinquency rate would be above the required standard by the Joint Commission. Is there an ethical violation, dilemma, or concern?

In this scenario, there is an ethical concern. In this scenario it is uncertain if the HIM graduate was responsible for the reports being generated and intentionally misrepresenting the delinquency rate or if she discovered the reports to be calculating the delinquency rate incorrectly and took appropriate action to remedy the problem.

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

It appears that the HIM graduate is not calculating the chart delinquency rate accurately either inadvertently (due to her lack of experience) or intentionally to misrepresent the rate to abide by Joint Commission's set standard. It is a possible fraudulent activity if delinquency rate is intentionally miscalculated.

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 oneself in the practice of the profession so as to bring honor to oneself, 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.

Guideline 2.2. Be aware of the profession's mission, values, and ethical principles, and practice in a manner consistent with them by acting honestly and responsibly.

Guideline 2.4. Ensure that the working environment is consistent and encourages compliance with the AHIMA Code of Ethics, taking reasonable steps to eliminate any conditions in the organizations that violate, interfere with, or discourage compliance with the code.

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.

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

There may be harm to the reputation of AHIMA and the graduate who knowingly acted unethically. There may be harm to the organization if this issue is discovered and not addressed. The organization's reputation would be jeopardized if the organization was knowingly engaged in this practice.

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

As a HIM graduate, she should be aware of the correct way to calculate incomplete records. She should be aware of the Code of Ethics. Each year, members and credentialed nonmembers must agree to abide by the Code of Ethics when joining AHIMA or renewing AHIMA Membership.

Resolution: This scenario provides an opportunity for the HIM graduate to bring the inaccuracy of the reports to the attention of the director, showing she is aware of the problem and makes recommendations of correction. However, if she intentionally manipulated the reports she has acted unethically. Education and training on the Code of Ethics should be undertaken with this member and the employer organization will need to consider what action to take with this staff member. Encourage the member to verify data integrity through the data source.