

Recruitment Partnership for the Future

Save to myBoK

by Genia Kaplan-Quinn, MSC, and Robert Garrie, MPA, RHIA

Many health professions have seen declining enrollments in their accredited educational programs over the last several years. HIM programs are no exception: health information technology (HIT) and health information administration (HIA) programs responding to a recent AHIMA survey reported 37 and 31 percent enrollment decreases, respectively.

Diminishing enrollment across HIT and HIA programs is worrisome because it can jeopardize the survival of professional programs. Currently, 38 percent of comprehensive universities are eliminating academic programs and 86 percent of doctorate-granting institutions report increasing scrutiny of academic programs. In short, fewer HIM students can lead to fewer HIM programs.

Yet, while we fight declining enrollments, HIM continues to be one of the fastest-growing professions. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), health information technicians are one of the top 10 fastest-growing allied health occupations. BLS projections indicate that HIT positions will grow approximately 49 percent between 2000 and 2010 and health service manager positions (which include HIA positions) will grow by 32 percent during that same period.

We have heard numerous stories from members about the difficulty in attracting qualified individuals to open positions. A recent American Hospital Association survey revealed that approximately 18 percent of billing/coding positions remain unfilled due to the lack of qualified applicants.

The Long-term Solution: Data

Long- and short-term solutions were needed to address this industry-wide dilemma. Using Team Talks and strategic Board of Directors meetings, the Association focused on the most critical issues. Hard data was needed to substantiate the anecdotal information that had been gathered thus far. In response, in early 2002 AHIMA commissioned a national work force study through the Center for Health Workforce Studies at the University at Albany, State University of New York, to assess current and future HIM work force needs, shortages, and salaries. This data will enable AHIMA to effectively advocate on behalf of its members for increased recognition and improved salaries. The work force study will be complete in 2003. For more information on the study, see "How Trends Shape the Work Force Today and Tomorrow," (*Journal of AHIMA*, April 2002), and watch for progress reports in upcoming issues of *AHIMA Advantage*.

The Short-term Solution: Recruitment

To develop and implement short-term answers, the Association developed a recruitment task force to explore the issues, talk to educators and program directors, and develop cost-effective ways of addressing the issue at a grass-roots level. The task force quickly realized that this was not a one-size-fits-all endeavor. While HIA programs generally attracted "traditional" students (ages 16-21), many HIT programs were drawing "nontraditional" students, that is, returning students or adults seeking second careers. This meant that solutions needed to target these audiences as well as their primary influencers: parents, teachers, and guidance counselors. The task force developed a four-part approach:

- create a toolbox of practical recruitment materials
- update and redesign AHIMA's current careers and recruitment Web site
- survey and update HIM information on career Web sites
- restructure the SHAPER (State Health Information Advisor for Professional and Educational Recruitment) program

All the Tools You Need

AHIMA's new Recruitment Toolbox is an online resource available to anyone interested in student recruitment efforts. Designed to attract both traditional and returning students, the Toolbox provides free, downloadable public relations and marketing tools including PowerPoint presentations, fact sheets, sample press releases, articles, brochures, and posters. To download the Toolbox, go to [...].

New on the Web

The second step was updating and redesigning AHIMA's career and recruitment Web site. Using vibrant colors and graphics as well as a dynamic introduction, the site is now more appealing and easier for prospective students and educators to navigate. View it at www.ahima.org/careers.

The Right Information

Then, the task force contacted hundreds of career Web sites. Many of these sites needed updated information about HIM while others had no HIM information at all. The task force has worked to correct this situation by providing accurate content. The response has been positive: administrators are happy to have current and correct information. This will be an ongoing effort for the task force, because new career sites are introduced continually. Already, HIM was spotlighted as the September allied health profession of the month when the Health Professions Network unveiled its new Web site. View the site at http://healthpronet.org/ahp_month/09_01.html.

A New Partnership

The final step was revitalizing the volunteer SHAPER program created several years ago. SHAPERs were component state association volunteers assisting in student recruitment. When prospective students contacted the Association, state SHAPERs followed up with them. But as the Web enabled students to research educational programs directly, they called AHIMA less. The task force noted that while the Internet had replaced the SHAPER program in some ways, nothing could replace the value of face-to-face contact with an HIM professional sharing knowledge and expertise.

In response to this changing dynamic, AHIMA developed Recruitment Partners: Partners in the Future of HIM. Recruitment Partners is an evolving and flexible program that aims to get more members involved in recruiting students at the local level. HIM educational programs do not have the time or resources to perform all the recruiting functions necessary to keep their programs viable. With Recruitment Partners, HIM professionals in the field can help by attending career fairs, speaking to community groups, visiting high schools, and more. For more information about Recruitment Partners, visit the AHIMA Community of Practice, look for updates in *Advantage*, and go to www.ahima.org/careers.

The Value of HIM Credentials

A cornerstone of the recruiting process is educating both prospective and current students about certification. As a credentialed HIM professional, your certification represents the dedication and effort you've put into mastering the HIM knowledge base. But not everyone is aware of what goes into earning a credential, and more importantly, not everyone realizes what an asset an AHIMA-credentialed individual can be.

To assist you, AHIMA has developed credential talking points. These talking points can be used on job interviews, to inform colleagues of what you do and why your credential is a virtual guarantee of professional quality. They can also be used to create your own presentations to educate interested parties.

The talking points include:

- the value of an AHIMA-credentialed employee
- how AHIMA credentials differ from other professional certification
- why AHIMA credentials are the benchmark for quality when it comes to certification
- the number of people currently holding AHIMA credentials
- what positions RHITs, RHIAAs, and CCS and CCS-P coding professionals hold

To download your copy of the credential talking points, go to the Members-only Image Marketing Web site at [...]. Use the talking points as tools to assist you along your career path.

To revitalize HIM education programs and bring new and talented people into the field, it will take all of us—educators, members, component state associations, and staff—working together. Share your enthusiasm and expertise to strengthen the future of the HIM field.

Recruitment 101

Take advantage of several successful recruitment strategies used by HIM programs:

- recruit students who arrive on campus undecided about a major
- recruit students from those taking a survey of allied health class
- use a mailing list of students on campus to recruit
- tap into “back-to-work” or job training program (depends on state)
- work with state HIM associations

Other resources include:

- department Web page
- posters and postcards marketing HIM program
- open house on campus
- HIM T-shirts in bookstore
- Parents’ Day
- AHIMA links to HIM program Web page
- word of mouth
- networking with college admission counselors
- targeted mailings (e.g., to college honor society students)
- graduates going back to their high schools to recruit
- innovative marketing by campus
- HIM faculty teaching core courses and recruiting undeclared students
- HIM courses open to other students
- HIM program information sessions
- program featured on cover of class schedule
- national articles about HIM

How Can I Help?

You have a Saturday afternoon free and you want to volunteer for your local HIM program by talking to prospective students and sharing your experience. But where should you go? How should you begin? First, contact your local school’s program director for a list of activities. If the director is looking for fresh ideas, use the places below to meet prospective students as well as their primary influencers—their parents.

- student council
- science club and other high school-sponsored organizations
- YMCA and YWCA
- Future Business Leaders of America
- 4H
- Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts
- church youth groups/Sunday school
- Rotary Club
- other local civic organizations

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