

Vision 2006: 10 Years of Advancing Professional Success, Lessons for the Decade to Come

Save to myBoK

by Linda L. Kloss, MA, RHIA, CAE

In 1996 AHIMA developed Vision 2006, a series of initiatives to ensure that the HIM field was prepared to flourish in a rapidly changing health information environment. Now it is 2006. What did we accomplish? What remains unfinished? Most importantly, what does Vision 2006 teach us about the decade to come?

In the early 1990s, the AHIMA Board of Directors developed a strategy—Vision 2000—as a call to action for health information management and technology advances. The association changed its name to publicly acknowledge its expanded focus from medical records to health information management. It set up an office in Washington, DC, and began playing a more prominent role in shaping policy, advocating for legal and regulatory changes to permit the use of new technologies while advancing confidentiality and security. It supported the formation of the Computer-based Patient Record Institute and sponsored the Institute of Medicine’s study on data security. AHIMA stepped out with new activism and paved the way for today’s expanded industry presence.

But what about HIM practice? Were professionals being trained as health information, rather than medical record, managers? The association’s new activism led to an examination of the profession’s readiness to fill this expanded presence.

What is known about managing electronic records and how will the body of knowledge be augmented? How can practitioners find the time to develop the e-HIM[®] protocols while burdened with paper-based processing? Will professional education and credentials continue to be relevant and sought after in an interconnected healthcare system? Can HIM professionals step into these new and expanding roles? These are the questions that led to Vision 2006.

Now it is 2006. The health IT industry is in early adolescence. The federal government has laid out a challenging vision for health IT adoption, and states are getting on board. Prototypes are being tested, and new mechanisms for standards and certification are being developed. Key questions about health IT adoption and public policy are being researched.

Where is the HIM field in its maturation? Were the goals of Vision 2006 realized? Were the right changes made, in the right sequence and at an acceptable pace? What comes next? This article explores the past decade in HIM and lays out the challenges that must be tackled to maintain the momentum of change.

Vision 2006 Starts with Storytelling

While Vision 2000 focused on external positioning for the HIM profession and AHIMA, Vision 2006 zeroed in on the keys to personal professional success: qualifications and competencies.

At its 1996 strategic planning meeting, the AHIMA Board of Directors created scenarios or stories depicting how health information would be managed in the next decade as traditional medical record management and processing roles transitioned to information management roles.

The 1996 board identified seven emerging roles, based on a study of the environment and by imagining the future:

- Information security/privacy officer
- Clinical data specialist
- Decision support analyst
- Patient information coordinator

- Data quality manager
- Clinical data repository manager
- Corporate HIM director

Board members described these roles using creative storytelling about a day in the work life of practitioners in these new roles. Between 1996 and 1999, task forces of experts expanded our understanding about the nature of the work and the competencies needed to excel in it. Position descriptions, career paths, and competency requirements for emerging roles were presented in AHIMA publications along with profiles of practitioners in the vanguard.¹

10 Years of Monumental Change

Today these roles look familiar, but 10 years ago they were not. In early 1996 HIPAA legislation had not been enacted, RHIOs were unheard of, and electronic health records were the reality in only a few, mostly academic, settings. A partial list of developments in this decade relating to these roles include:

- Privacy, security, and access are now acknowledged HIM domains of practice, and HIM is the most common background for healthcare privacy managers.
- AHIMA's Certified in Healthcare Privacy/Security (CHP and CHPS) are dominant certifications in this domain.
- A network of HIM professionals is educating consumers about their information rights and benefits of personal health records as envisioned in the patient information coordinator role.
- *Interoperability, health information exchange, record locator services, RHIOs*, and many more new terms are part of our vernacular. While there may not be regional databases as were envisioned in the Vision 2006 story, the notion of HIM practice at the regional and statewide level is clearly playing out.
- Quality indicators, report cards, pay-for-performance, and consumer-driven healthcare are spotlighting data analysis and data quality as envisioned in the decision support and data quality roles.
- Technologies for natural language processing, voice recognition, and computer-assisted coding are coming on line and shaping new clinical data roles.

Ten years ago, it was a commonly held belief that HIM was largely a hospital-based records processing and archival practice. AHIMA's 2002 work force research, conducted by the association's Foundation of Research and Education (FORE), exploded this myth, finding that HIM professionals actually hold more than 125 distinct job titles in 40 different work settings, with hospitals the site of practice for half of all HIM professionals. This is not because there are fewer hospital jobs, but because the jobs in other sectors are expanding rapidly.

In this tumultuous decade, Vision 2006 focused on ensuring that HIM education and credentials would continue to be highly valued for a broader scope of practice in an interconnected healthcare system. Great progress has been made, but this remains a work in progress.

Goals and Achievements on Many Fronts

The Vision 2006 goals, shown [below], focused the association's energies on multiple fronts.

AHIMA and FORE conducted qualitative and quantitative research to understand changing HIM practice and new career opportunities. The needs and attitudes of employers were studied, and image marketing raised the profile of HIM credentials. Revised certification exam blueprints updated competencies for entry-level practice. Standards for academic programs in HIM and processes for accreditation were modernized. Advanced practice credentials were introduced, and the association spotlighted tangible career-enhancing benefits of professional advancement through advanced degrees and continuing education.

AHIMA invested in member continuing-education programming by developing innovative learning resources. It introduced virtual networking through Communities of Practice and a virtual reference library through the FORE Library: HIM Body of Knowledge. The list of accomplishments is long, and results in one area could often be leveraged in another. For example, work force research findings supported student recruitment; credential advancements were used in marketing to employers. Highlights of the Vision 2006 learning years are also shown on the preceding page.

The list does not tell the whole story, because at the same time AHIMA expanded its practice leadership, policy and government relations, and ability to develop meaningful continuing education opportunities for the field.

Vision 2006

Statement of Goals

1. HIM is recognized as a profession with a unique domain and defined knowledge and skill set.
2. HIM practice is well grounded with standards of practice supported by applied research.
3. There are clearly defined opportunities and paths for members to advance when they make the investment in their own lifelong learning.
4. AHIMA-granted credentials are highly valued in securing a first job and advancing in one's career.
5. Members in diverse roles cite AHIMA and its component state associations as their chief source of highly valued professional information and research.
6. AHIMA influences policy, regulation, and standards affecting healthcare information.

Vision 2006

Achievements

Academic

1. Designed an educational framework for HIM education and revised model curricula at all levels of education: predegree coding programs, associate degree, bachelor's, and HIM master's
2. Updated standards for accreditation for HIA and HIT programs and revamped accreditation processes; formed the Commission on Accreditation for Health Informatics and Information Management Education to advance accreditation
3. Implemented approval for HIM master's programs and for coding programs
4. Designed curriculum for HIA tracks in baccalaureate programs
5. Published the seminal textbooks for our field
6. Developed a virtual technology lab to support education reform

Research

1. Completed research of HIM work force including survey and analyses of members, employers, students, and faculty
2. Conducted futures studies on coding and medical transcription
3. Completed important policy research for the federal government in areas including fraud prevention and state-level health information exchange
4. Provided funding for targeted research to expand the HIM body of knowledge
5. Conducted member benefits and needs research, including professional self-assessment tools.
6. Launched *Perspectives in HIM*, a research journal for the field, now indexed in Medline

Certification

1. Changed credential titles to RHIA and RHIT
2. Raised the bar on RHIT certification to associate degree and closed the independent study program
3. Gained nearly 1,000 new RHIAs through the Window of Opportunity program
4. Developed the CHP, CHPS, and CCS-P credentials for specialty advancement
5. Developed the CCA for entry-level coding.

Professional Advancement

1. Published books and reports on emerging roles including member profiles and pathways to help members move into new roles
2. Introduced a fellowship (FAHIMA)
3. Developed and published a professional definition
4. Offered specialty advanced institutes
5. Developed a full line of professional development resources, from print publications to Web training

Marketing the Profession

1. Conducted national student recruitment and offered materials to schools and local groups at no charge
2. Promoted the profession and AHIMA credentials through image marketing campaigns
3. Launched ongoing public and industry relations programs to promote AHIMA positions, the accomplishments of HIM professionals, and advances in HIM through standards, best practices, and research
4. Created a national consumer education campaign on information rights and the PHR

Then Came e-HIM

As is true in any large-scale change project, sequencing and timing are everything. With its focus on strengthening professional foundations, Vision 2006 was well under way when the national health IT agenda was seriously launched in the public and private sectors earlier this decade. This allowed AHIMA to become a respected partner in the national agenda, because the field had been thinking and working on these issues for many years.

What was needed next was an accelerated effort to support the transformation from paper to electronic practice. In 2002 we introduced e-HIM as a rallying cry for practice transformation. The list of e-HIM accomplishments in the areas of practice guidelines, standards, and training materials is impressive. A review of the topics explored in the association's practice briefs shows the intellectual contributions of practice leaders from across the US and Canada. These topics cover data dictionaries, patient identification models in RHIOs, maintaining legal health records in a hybrid environment, defining the legal record for purposes of disclosure, the role of personal health records in EHRs, EHR career opportunities, computer-assisted coding, core data sets, the complete medical record in a hybrid environment, e-signatures, e-mail, electronic document management, and speech recognition.

AHIMA has also provided leadership for industry-wide national health IT standards development. It is a founding sponsor for the Certification Commission for Healthcare Information Technology and is assisting in national project research to study privacy and security practice. E-HIM will continue to be a high priority for AHIMA because the transition to e-HIM is also in its adolescence. Through e-HIM, AHIMA is addressing real issues and recommending real solutions.

The Next Decade: Information Management

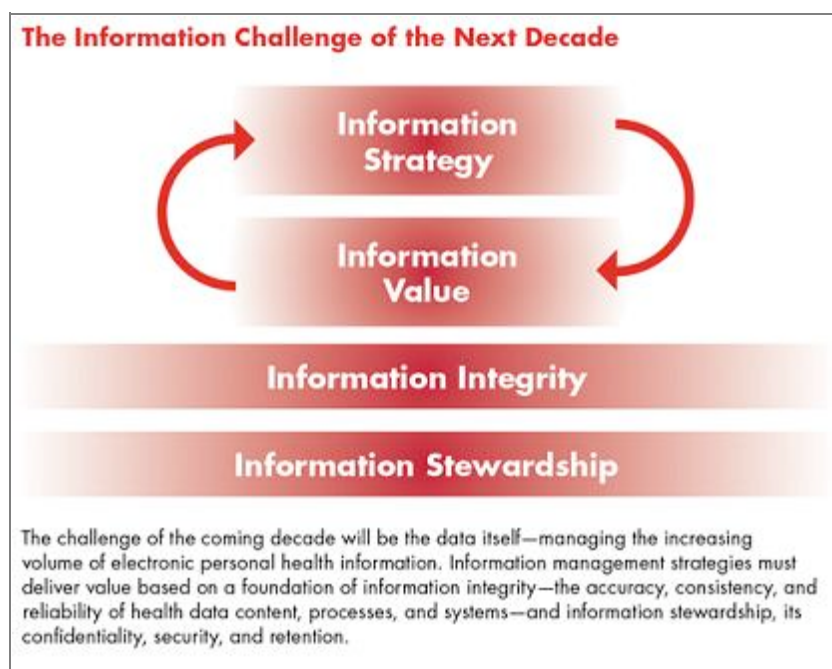
Sound strategy flows from understanding the environment and its implications. If the past decade has been a time of profound change for HIM, the one ahead will require full engagement by all HIM professionals and courage to make difficult choices for the sake of practice excellence.

In 2011, the first of the baby boomers will reach 65. Medicare enrollment will rise to 20 percent of the population by 2025, and these trends in aging will compound other problems in financing our healthcare system. Even if major health reform measures are enacted in the next five years, their effect will not likely reduce the stress on the system in the short term.

Most agree that an interconnected health information system is a necessary precondition for true reform—in safety and quality, cost control, benefits, and access. So the focus on accelerating adoption and achieving return on investment in IT is expected to remain a priority for the US, as it will be in other countries.

The real work will be in learning how to use digital information to improve care, expedite clinical research, support population and public health, reform health financing, and control burgeoning health fraud. Confidentiality and security of digital personal health information will continue to be in the spotlight for consumers, policy makers, and practitioners.

A central focus will be to help people use their own health information to be better informed health consumers. In their research labs, technology companies such as Google, Intel, and IBM are developing new personal health technologies and applications to transform chronic disease management and interactions between patients and their providers. Banks are processing health data through advanced information management techniques, and health savings accounts are linking financial and clinical information. Payers are stepping forward to be the purveyors of personal health records. Taken together, these trends suggest that transformative health information advances are likely to come from sectors that were not on our radar screens in the last decade.



As AHIMA's 2006 president reminded us earlier this year, the HIM field must focus on solutions to realize the vision of AHIMA, quality healthcare through quality information.² We have been through a decade of health IT; now it is time for the decade of health IM—information management. Given the volume of personal health information that will be available in digital form and routinely exchanged among providers and between providers and other trusted stakeholders, the challenge of the coming years will be the information itself. As shown in the figure “The Information Challenge of the Next Decade,” above, the challenge will be to effect IM strategies that deliver value on a foundation of information integrity and sound stewardship.

For HIM: Competencies, Solutions, Advocacy

Information strategy entails sound planning and policy development. The value of information is its usefulness to those who must use it to care for patients and who manage healthcare, public health, and other essential systems. Information integrity is its dependability and trustworthiness. More specifically, integrity is the accuracy, consistency, and reliability of the information content, processes, and systems.³ And of course, stewardship is its confidentiality, security, and retention.

These are basic elements of health information management, but they are not the purview of the HIM discipline alone. All who work in healthcare are stakeholders in setting sound strategy and deriving value. To achieve our vision of quality healthcare through quality information, HIM professionals will need to be more collaborative than ever before.

In the coming decade, AHIMA's strategy must continue on three fronts: professional competence, practice solutions, and advocacy. Competence is the knowledge and skill to do something well and to perform to a required standard. Entry-level competencies that are taught in HIA and HIT programs have been redefined twice in the last 10 years. Expect continued upgrades to standards for HIM education and accreditation as practice is reshaped by technology.

For those in practice, many competencies can be gained through continuing education and on-the-job training. But many new roles will require advanced degrees, so expect continued pressure for academic advancement. As the marker of competence, our certification standards too must continue to be upgraded so that they reflect value in practice.

The HIM field must commit to devise new practice solutions through applied research and shared best practices. AHIMA is a community of professionals with shared interests, and this community offers unparalleled opportunities for professional networking through state and local associations and through nationwide programs such as the Communities of Practice. Being engaged with colleagues in a professional community is the surest way to learn about new and improved practices and to find solutions to today's problems. In the decade ahead, practice leaders must come forward to be mentors and coaches for colleagues who do not have support in their own organizations.

AHIMA will continue to advocate for sound information policies, standards, laws, and regulations and to inform policy makers and employers about the value of AHIMA credentials and HIM competencies. But these efforts must be demonstrated each day by HIM experts who are leading change in their organizations.

The HIM field has the opportunity—indeed the obligation—to provide leadership for the IM agenda. Vision 2006 taught us the power of community working together toward an important strategic goal. We should celebrate the many successes of the past decade and move on with confidence in pursuit of our vision.

“Vision 2006 raised the bar for an even stronger commitment to patient privacy and patient advocacy. When the industry faced implementation of HIPAA, AHIMA members were ready, willing, and able to lead the way.”

—Jill Callahan Dennis, JD, RHIA
AHIMA President, 2006

“Vision 2006 was a pivotal initiative in advancing the profession because it formalized the transition from medical record practice to information management. It put forward a new model of practice that staked out the profession's role, legitimizing its value and position in the evolving and broader field of health informatics.” BR>

—Merida Johns, PhD, RHIA
AHIMA President, 1997

“Over the years, and at just the right moments in time, the HIM leaders have redefined our profession and set in motion strategies to meet the needs of our profession.”

—Jean Clark, RHIA
AHIMA President, 1995

“Through this period we have always tried to think 10 years forward. It pushes us to focus on what more we should do. At the same time, it's good to look 10 years back to see how far we've come.”

—Margaret Skurka, MS, RHIA, CCS
AHIMA President, 2000

“Vision 2006 was the pivotal strategy, not only to move the profession from managing paper to managing information, but also to be recognized as the profession best positioned to influence standards and policy at the national level.”

—Barbara Siegel, MS, RHIT, FAHIMA
AHIMA President, 2003

“It's good to look back and celebrate the distance we've traveled. Vision 2006 provided the framework for us to define our body of knowledge in a wider context than ever before.”

—Barbara Odom Wesley, PhD, RHIA,
FAHIMA, AHIMA President, 2002

“Vision 2006 was pivotal in the development of the associate, baccalaureate, and master’s degree curriculum models. [It] encouraged educators to rethink curriculum in order to train a workforce for an electronic healthcare environment.”

—Melanie Brodnik, PhD, RHIA
AHIMA President, 2004

“The impetus for Vision 2006 was recognition that the roles of HIM must change and expand to meet the future needs of the healthcare industry. With the landscape changing almost daily, HIM opportunities will continue to evolve in the years before us.”

—Ellen MacDonald, MPH, RHIA, CCS
AHIMA President, 1996

“One important result has been the mobilization of thousands of HIM professionals who are meeting the challenges of change head on. They are the innovative partners for Vision 2006 and beyond.”

—Margaret Stewart, RHIA,
AHIMA President, 1998

“Vision 2006 gave members targets for continuing their education, stepping out of traditional roles, seeking more education, and highlighting our value to the industry.”

—Claire Dixon-Lee, PhD, RHIA, FAHIMA
AHIMA President, 1999

Notes

1. American Health Information Management Association. *Evolving HIM Careers: Seven Roles for the Future*. Chicago, IL: AHIMA, 1999. “Trailblazers” profile columns appeared in issues of Advantage newsletter in the mid and late-1990s.
2. Dennis, Jill Callahan. “Quality Care through Quality Information.” *Journal of AHIMA* 77, no. 1 (2006): 8.
3. Information Integrity Coalition. “What Is Information Integrity?” Available online at www.informationintegrity.org.

Linda L. Kloss (linda.kloss@ahima.org) is chief executive officer of AHIMA.

Article citation:

Kloss, Linda L. "Vision 2006: 10 Years of Advancing Professional Success, Lessons for the Decade to Come." *Journal of AHIMA* 77, no.9 (October 2006): 28-34.