

Working in the Hybrid World: HIM Director Brings Together Multiple Media, Many Perspectives

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by Anne Zender, vice president of communications

Director of HIM and hospital privacy officer Cindy Pugliese, RHIA, has a number of roles in her job description. But her role goes beyond her job title. At her facility, Pugliese sees herself as an advocate for the legal health record.

Pugliese believes that as an HIM professional, she must bring together the clinical and IT staffs and help them understand that the record serves as an official legal document. "My value as an HIM professional is to look at the medical record in a different way than the clinical and technical folks," she says. "We need to advocate for reliability, version control, and appropriate editing and correction."

"There isn't one person or one champion who makes the EHR happen. It's a team. Everyone is a player."

—Cindy Pugliese, RHIA

A Foot in Both Worlds

Pugliese's challenge is to bring existing concepts from the paper world into the electronic world. Like many organizations, her facility, Hartford Hospital in Hartford, CT, a 867-bed facility, has a foot in both worlds. It uses a hybrid record that incorporates paper, electronic, and scanned image formats.

The biggest challenge in this environment is release of information (ROI), says Pugliese. ROI staff need to work with all three kinds of media on a daily basis. That's why it's important, she says, to have a well-defined legal medical record.

Because components of the medical record may be stored in more than one place, designing data flows to maintain the most current and accurate version in all places is critical. Furthermore, the ability to track updates and corrections to electronic medical record entries supports the integrity of the legal medical record. "The hospital has chosen, in some instances, where our technology cannot support version control, that the paper remains the legal document despite the desire to move away from paper," Pugliese says.

In contrast, where a component of the legal medical record is electronic, documents are printed on demand for such things as research or outside review. Otherwise, internal use of this documentation is through the electronic application. "To print every document didn't make sense," she says. "The volume of storing all that paper was just overwhelming." To make this work, she says, it's been critical to ensure that all steps of the process make sense and allow clinicians to easily find the information they need electronically.

Will the organization ever have a completely electronic record? "I'm an optimist, but I'm not sure exactly how it's going to look yet," Pugliese says. She isn't sure she'll see doctors typing progress notes any time soon, but she is excited by the promises of other technologies, such as voice recognition.

The Many Roles of Data

Throughout her career, Pugliese has found that understanding the many roles of data from multiple perspectives is a useful skill. Earlier in her career, as a quality management coordinator, she found herself "knee deep in clinical practice and how a clinician thought." Moving to Hartford as a data manager and coding supervisor and then becoming HIM director and privacy officer gave her a different perspective altogether. Those HIM professionals who are moving from the paper world into the

electronic world—or some combination of both—will benefit from taking an organizationwide view of the role of data, she says.

Carving out the HIM role in the EHR process is another important role, Pugliese says. To do this, an HIM professional should "put yourself in the role of advocate for the medical record; then your role becomes easy," she says. "Let people understand the skill set you bring to the table."

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