

# The Development of Profession of Health Information Management in the United States

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**Abstract:** Health information professionals strive to provide high quality data for patient care, research, and reimbursement. This article provides information about the allied health profession known as health information management. It includes a brief historical overview of the profession, describes the various job roles that a health information manager can assume in health care, and outlines the educational curriculum followed in order to prepare and qualify for a career as a registered health information administrator (RHIA). Moreover, examples of collaboration between health information management and other allied health disciplines are provided. Finally, the article discusses future prospects for employment in the profession.

**Key words:** health information management; profession; education

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[摘要] 健康信息管理人员致力于为诊疗、科研和收费提供高质量的数据。本文介绍健康相关行业之一健康信息管理学的相关信息, 包括职业发展简史、健康信息管理者在医疗机构中的职业角色, 以及为获得注册健康信息管理员 (RHIA) 职业资格所应接受的教育科目。举例介绍了健康服务管理学与其他健康相关学科的合作关系, 并讨论了行业的就业前景。

[关键词] 健康信息管理; 职业; 教育

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## 1 Introduction

Health information management contributes to improving the quality of health care by ensuring that the best information is always available in order to make effective and efficient health care decisions. Health information managers work behind-the-scenes in order to make health information accessible and manageable. They combine skills such as computer expertise, working with numbers and knowledge of health care to translate data into understandable and easily manageable information.

Generally, the Health Information Management (HIM) program resides in the Department of Health Services and Information Management in the School of Allied Health Sciences. It prepares competent entry level health information professionals for a variety of positions in health care settings. A secondary purpose of the program is to provide, via teaching, research, and service, continuing education, support, and consultation for health care professionals throughout the region. The program

also serves as an important basic training for students to enter other graduate programs within the school.

This article will give a brief historical overview of the health information management profession, describe the various job roles that a health information manager can assume in health care, outline the educational curriculum followed in order to prepare for a career as a health information management professional, and describe the requirements for becoming a registered health information administrator (RHIA). In addition, examples of collaboration between HIM and other allied health disciplines in the school of allied health at ECU will be provided. Finally, the future outlook for employment in the profession will be discussed.

## 2 History

The health information management (HIM) profession has a rich history dating back to the early 1900s. In 1928, the Association of Record Librarians of North America was organized under the sponsorship of the American College of Surgeons. The purpose was to elevate the standards of the clinical record in medical facilities<sup>[1]</sup>. This first group led the way to what is now the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA).

Health information management professionals today play a vital role in all aspects of health care. The profession continues to hold the premise of our early predecessors. Yet today we no longer are seeking ways to maintain hard copy records. The future of our profession will focus on increased technology as we move into a paperless society and the electronic health record (EHR). This has increased the demand for health information

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management professions in the workplace.

### 3 Occupational Description

Registered health information administrators (RHIA) are skilled in the collection, interpretation, and analysis of patient data. Additionally, they receive the training necessary to assume managerial positions related to these functions. RHIA interact with all levels of an organization - clinical, financial, and administrative - that employs patient data in decision making and every day operations<sup>[2]</sup>.

RHIAs enjoy job placements in a broad range of settings that span the continuum of healthcare including office-based physician practices, nursing homes, home health agencies, mental health facilities, and public health agencies. The growth of managed care has created additional job opportunities in the HMOs, PPOs, and insurance companies. Prospects are especially strong in these settings for RHIA who possess advanced degrees in business or health administration<sup>[2]</sup>.

### 4 Job Descriptions

Opportunities for RHIA are numerous. RHIA have various types of job descriptions, as the table below.

APC Coordinator	Clinical Data Specialist
Clinical Coding Specialist	Compliance Officer
Data Quality Manager	Data Resource Administrator
Decision Support Specialist	DRG Coordinator
Educator	HIM Director
HIM Compliance Specialist	Information Security Manager
Medical Staff Coordinator	Patient Information Coordinator
Privacy Officer	Quality Improvement Director
Risk Manager	Utilization Management Director
(Chief) Privacy Officer	Security Officer
HIPAA Compliance Coordinator (HFMA)	Compliance and Privacy Officer: eHealth

**4.1 Employment Characteristics** HIM professionals bring unique skills to the healthcare industry. These skills include the ability to: ① Manage medical records and health information systems. ② Enhance the quality and uses of data within the healthcare industry. ③ Summarize data into useful information. ④ Comply with standards and regulations regarding health information. ⑤ Protect the privacy and security of patient health information. ⑥ Ensure health information is complete and available to legitimate users. ⑦ Code health information for reimbursement and research.

As a result health information management professionals are found in a variety of health care settings, payer organizations, research and policy agencies, accounting and legal firms, and information technology. In the information systems environment, health information professionals develop, market, and implement software for electronic health records; verify that systems comply with standards and regulations; and work to ensure the quality, privacy, and security of electronic medical records.

For many HIM professionals, salary levels are driven by their job titles, their education levels, and where they live. According to the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) latest salary survey the average annual full-time HIM salary across all work settings is \$55,676 and can range from \$46,017 as a health information administrator in the long term health care setting to \$84,383 as an independent

consultant/vendor in the private sector<sup>[3]</sup>.

**4.2 How RHIA Benefit the Lay Public** RHIA are an important source of information for the lay public concerning issues pertaining to privacy, confidentiality, and access to personal health information. For example, the public benefits from RHIA, because of their steadfast commitment to safeguarding the integrity of patient information. Furthermore, the Health Information Management profession is continually adapting to keep pace with technology such that the cost-efficiency of the health care facility is insured while the best interest of patients is also protected.

### 5 Educational Programs: Academic Curriculum and Training

**5.1 Length** Health information management educational programs vary in the length of time it takes to complete the prerequisite, cognate and core courses to qualify for graduation. The HIM program at East Carolina University offers a full time curriculum that can be completed in approximately 2 years after fulfilling the university required foundation courses and HIM prerequisite courses. A part time curriculum is also available for those that elect to complete the program in 3 years.

**5.2 Prerequisites** A minimum 2.5 GPA (grade point average) is required for admission to the professional phase (junior and senior levels) of the health information management curriculum. Prerequisite, core and cognate courses required for full acceptance in the HIM program include: College Algebra; General Biology; Human Physiology and Anatomy; Principles of Microeconomics recommended; Medical Terminology for Health Professionals; Professional Roles and Environments in Health Care; Introduction to Computers; Biostatistics or an equivalent statistics course.

**5.3 Curriculum** Students in the health information management program receive instruction in Applied Medical Sciences; Health Care Delivery Systems; Diagnostic and Procedural Coding I; Health Service Coding; Quality Management in Health Care; Biomedical Research Support; Health Data Structures; Management of Health Information Services Department; Concepts in Health Information Technology; Health Information Systems; Health Care Payment Systems; Professional Ethical Codes and Law in Health Care; Written Communication and Documentation in Health Care; Interpersonal Team Skills for Health Care Supervisors and Practitioners; Leadership in Health Care; Health Information Management; Personnel Management and Supervision in Health Care and Health Care Finance and Accounting.

In addition to the didactic courses two professional practice experiences and a final capstone/ Allied Health Management Experience equalling 256 hours is required.

Courses are offered both face-to-face and on-line to meet the learning needs for students accepted in the program.

**5.4 Research and Service Collaboration between the Health Information Management Program and Other Departments within the School of Allied Health Sciences** Faculty in the department of health information management have collaborated in service as well as research projects with faculty from other departments within the school of allied health sciences. For example, health information management faculty collaborated with their counterparts in the department of communication sciences and disorders in order to help improve task operations in the speech and hear-

ing clinic. As a result of this joint venture, suggested changes to patient record access and storage were expected to help the clinic become more effective and efficient.

In addition, HIM faculty collaborated in research with faculty in biostatistics. Their research investigated inequity in the treatment for chest pain and found differences in treatment associated with patient gender and race. These were retrospective studies based on data collected from individual patient medical records. Health information management established the protocol for case finding based on the application of proper diagnostic and procedural coding parameters<sup>[4]</sup>.

Health information management also collaborated with physician assistant studies and biostatistics in research designed to demonstrate the effectiveness of online instruction and learning in an undergraduate medical terminology course. As HIM was one of the first departments to employ web based technologies, such as course management software (CMS), these studies were considered pioneering examples of the effectiveness of online learning. For example, they demonstrated that comparable learning outcomes were achieved for online learners as for face to face learners<sup>[5]</sup>.

### 5.5 Accreditation and Certification

**5.5.1 Accreditation** The Commission on Accreditation for Health Informatics and Information Management Education (CAHIIM) - is the accrediting organization for degree-granting programs in health informatics and information management. CAHIIM serves the public interest by establishing quality standards for the educational preparation of future health information management (HIM) professionals. When a program is accredited by CAHIIM, it means that it has voluntarily undergone a rigorous review process and has been determined to meet or exceed the standards set by the sponsoring professional organization - the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) - in cooperation with the Commission. CAHIIM accreditation is a way to recognize and publicize best practices for HIM Education Programs<sup>[6]</sup>.

The baccalaureate program in health information management at East Carolina University is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Health Informatics and Information Management Education. The program was last surveyed in 2003, and is fully accredited. The curriculum of the health information management program is designed following the *HIM Baccalaureate Degree Program Standards* accredited educational program for the health information administrator.

**5.5.2 Certification** Once students earn a BS degree with a major in Health Information Management they are eligible to complete a national examination in order to become certified as Registered Health Information Administrators (RHIA's).

Certification is a process by which a non-governmental organization or association recognizes the competence of an individual who has met certain qualifications as determined by that organization or association. To achieve certification from the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA), individuals must meet the eligibility requirements and pass a certification examination. Certification provides validation of professional competence for employers and consumers:

①Demonstrates a dedication to quality healthcare and maintaining high standards in managing confidential health information.

②Presents evidence of commitment to implementing best practices and applying current technology solutions. ③Ensures current knowledge through continuing education, experience, and verification of entry-level competency. ④Supports an individual's ability to adhere to industry standards and regulations. ⑤Enhances career development by providing validation that an individual has attained and maintains a level of competence<sup>[7]</sup>.

**5.6 Employment Outlook** According to the US Bureau of Labor statistics, employment of health information administrators is expected to grow faster than the average for all other occupations through 2014, as the health care industry continues to expand and diversify[3]. Job opportunities will be especially good in offices of health practitioners, general medical and surgical hospitals, home health care services, and outpatient care centers. However, employment opportunities are also expected to expand in long term care facilities, mental health centers, federal agencies, state departments of health, and in academic centers. There are also growing opportunities for the employment of RHIA's with law firms, computer software companies, and private consulting firms.

Recent studies show that health information management education programs are not graduating sufficient numbers of qualified students to meet the above listed marketplace needs (AHIMA, 2004). In fact, the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) has recently announced a major need to train students in the field of HIM. Consequently, the employment outlook for the profession is excellent<sup>[3]</sup>.

As the federal government mandates the adoption of electronic health records and establishes penalties for violating information privacy and confidentiality, data managers will also have to be well trained as information security officers. As a result Health information Management is becoming an attractive professional alternative for computer science, information technology (IT), and management information systems (MIS) specialists<sup>[3]</sup>.

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