

## **Becoming Technology Savvy: Where Do HIM Professionals Start?**

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*(Editor's note: This month kicks off a new column for ADVANCE—Hands On Help: Technology Applications and their impact on health information management [HIM]. The column authored by Leslie Fox, president of Care Communications Inc., on Family Systems Theory and its applications in managing relationships will now be periodically published on the ADVANCE Web site at [www.ADVANCEforHIM.com](http://www.ADVANCEforHIM.com).*

*In keeping with the Hands on Help theme, Patty Thierry, MBA, RHIA, CCS, director of information management at Care Communications Inc. will provide a practical look at current and emerging health care technologies and how they impact HIM professionals.)*

Technology inventions are moving at lightspeed and we must do everything we can to accelerate our learning in this area. The best way to master technology is to expose yourself to current and emerging concepts. It's important to understand the capabilities of technology so you can participate in conversations on how to best apply technology's functionality. For example, in the area of coding, we know from all the predications that technology will radically change the way we perform work (see the June and December 1999 American Health Information Management Association [AHIMA] Advantage for predications on coding related futures). Now is the time to understand this technology, watch it develop, talk about it with others and begin thoughtful planning.

Another example is the implementation of information security measures. We need to do more than implement educational programs, perform audits and implement network access and authentication methods. Today we need to get involved with understanding firewalls, encryption methodologies and remote telecommunication technologies. With an eye toward telemedicine and consumer access, firewalls, encryption and remote telecommunication technologies will be the key elements in creating virtual private networks. You can start by teaming up with someone in your information systems (IS) department who can demonstrate and explain information security technology. Or you can find a technology buddy through one of your local HIM or Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society (HIMSS) organizations.

### **The New Language of Technology and Health Care**

Another starting strategy is learning the new language of information technology and health care, which has grown dramatically. Where we once frequently conversed using acronyms and terms like MPI, CPR, CPT, encoder, electronic signature, Internet, HTML, LAN and e-mail, we are faced with an explosion of new terms representing the transformation of our new world of work. In addition to last decade's terms, how many of the following are part of your conversations today? Digital certificates, virtual private networks, Active X, XML, Java, e-business, middleware, LOINC, continuous speech recognition and consumer informatics. These terms represent only a sampling of the current language of technology and health care. If these terms are unfamiliar to you, don't waste another minute; your success in the future requires you to learn them quickly.

What's the rush? Health care organizations are already breaking new ground in response to business needs,

consumer wants and competition. For example, you can expect your employer to move more of their business processes and services to the Internet. Consumers are moving closer to the management of their health information and treatment. Technology applications will enable consumers to schedule their own appointments, access test results and notes from office visits and maintain personal health records online. The consumer movement creates new imperatives for health information professionals to address issues such as consumer access to health data, information and network security, accuracy and timeliness of data, and display of health data and information. You will want to stay abreast of your organization's e-business strategy so you can ensure that HIM principles are taken into consideration during the design phase.

### Developing a Technology Learning Plan

How you personally use information technology says a lot about how prepared you are to implement and use the technology of this next decade. Take a minute to think about how you use technology today. Do you use it to keep in touch with family and friends via e-mail? Do you use the vast resources of Internet to research personal or work-related topics? Participate in a favorite hobby by visiting Web sites or subscribing to listserves or other kinds of mailing lists? Do you read consumer technology-related literature at least once a month? Are you proficient in using a word processor software? Can you manage your finances using a spreadsheet? Have you used a relational database such as Access to keep track of addresses, recipes or your music collection? What does your use of technology or lack of in your personal life say about your preparedness for your professional life?

Now, take a look at your professional life and your use of technology. Identify the technology on the horizon that will impact your professional life in the next one to three years. If you aren't sure of what's on the horizon, check out the AHIMA ([www.ahima.org](http://www.ahima.org)) and ADVANCE ([www.ADVANCEforHIM.com](http://www.ADVANCEforHIM.com)) Web sites for upcoming trends. Be as informed as you can and make a personal plan to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to keep up with future employment opportunities. There are numerous resources available to you such as technology Web sites, magazines and professional journals, seminars, publications, online training and traditional onsite classroom work. Assessing your personal and professional understanding and use of technology is the right first step in developing a professional development plan. Because technology never stands still, you will always be in a learning mode.

### Looking Ahead

Each month, this column will discuss key health care technology initiatives. Through case studies, we will explore the use of technology and its impact on HIM professionals. Your technology learning plan will grow throughout the year as you inventory your skills and add additional knowledge. As the year progresses, your honed knowledge of current and emerging technology combined with your technical HIM skills and understanding of health care information flow, will enable you to make important contributions to health care delivery in the 21st century.

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