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Leading the Transformation to eHIM

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Patty: With this column, we begin the fourth year of writing Hands-on Help. In the very first column, way back on Feb. 15, 1999, you wrote, "This exclusive column is designed to help readers see the opportunities and meet the challenges of the changing workplace for HIM professionals." You went on to say that outsourcing and telecommuting are two key ways in which organizations have dramatically changed the way work is accomplished. Do you still think that those are the two key drivers of change in the HIM workplace?

Leslie: Over the past three years we have indeed seen an increase in both outsourcing and telecommuting. Today they are routinely used as strategies for staffing in health information management (HIM). These changes occurring in the HIM workplace have been incremental, and are fitting well within the traditional ways in which HIM work has been accomplished. However, today the key driver of change for the HIM professional is more transformative than merely outsourcing and telecommuting: HIM is rapidly evolving into eHIM!

Patty: E-commerce has finally come to health care and it creates new ways to manage HIM functions and medical records. Is that what you mean by eHIM?

Leslie: Yes. If the use of e-commerce in health care is eHealth, then the application of the Internet and its derivatives to HIM practice must be eHIM. It is a vision of the future of HIM practice that is starting to take form.

Patty: In the 2001 eHealth Task Force Report, recently accepted by the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) Board, the task force described such a vision. It is as follows:

Vision Statement for e-Health Information Management (e-HIM)

E-health presents a new frontier for managing health information. HIM professionals will reinvent traditional HIM functions for a health record model in which the patient is part of the documentation team. In this model the health record will be designed and/or maintained by a trusted third-party organization or by the patient. Individually identifiable data will be transmitted and accessed via the Internet.

HIM professionals will clearly define the mission-critical role of a "cyber-health record practitioner." They will develop standards of practice that support the implementation of AHIMA's e-health tenets, which address the security, privacy and quality standards for personal health information on the Internet.

Leslie: The potential of the Internet and its derived technologies are still largely untapped in health care. Initially, issues of privacy and security slowed down the adoption of this technology. However, the proposed Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) regulations and improved encryption and other security software have made health care professionals more open to the use of Internet to manage health

information. Thus, we can now use the potential of the Internet to change the traditional HIM paradigm, as no other technology has in the past. Health information can now travel safely and easily to the users, instead of the users traveling to the information.

Patty: There are several HIM functions that can be significantly improved by using Internet technologies. For example, HIM departments that leverage the Internet to manage their transcription function gain more control over the function and enable physicians to more efficiently complete their records without the hassles of today's manual record completion process. Physicians can sign transcribed reports using a Web browser from any remote location. Physicians can remotely access reports when they need them, as can coders and other authorized users. Remote coding is another example of the use of Internet technology that not only supports new ways of managing the coding function but addresses recruitment and retention issues. Other examples include encoders that are provided by application service providers (ASPs).

Leslie: In addition, the Internet offers the opportunity to access records via an organization's Intranet, typically via a virtual private network (VPN) or other secure access method. Thus multiple users can access medical records, simultaneously. This enhances the efficiency of retrieving and using patient medical records, thereby increasing the value of HIM practices to the health care organization. The implementation of Internet-based applications is key to taking HIM practices to a higher level of efficiency and quality customer service. Health care organizations are more pressed than ever to control costs and improve customer satisfaction. Reducing or eliminating paper medical records has long been a dream of the health care industry. Internet technologies are bringing us a giant step closer to realizing that dream.

Patty: Then we should start discussing how HIM professionals can lead the change to this new HIM paradigm.

Leslie: Leadership is the key. We are always managing and coping with incremental change. However, changes that impact virtually every aspect of how a profession functions, and require that people adjust to a radically altered environment are "adaptive changes." They are changes that must be made to survive. Ronald A. Heifetz and Donald L. Laurie discuss this concept in *The Work of Leadership* published in the *Harvard Business Review*, December 2001, p. 131.

Patty: Well, certainly moving from working with paper records to working with electronic information in cyberspace is a radically altered environment. I would call it an adaptive change.

Leslie: Leading people through adaptive change challenges deeply held beliefs and presents new competing perspectives. Adaptive change in the workplace requires more of leaders and followers than merely learning new processes, systems or techniques. It requires new ways of thinking and perceiving your world of work. During the course of such profound change, anxiety in the workplace is likely to increase.

Patty: The symptoms of anxiety in managers and staff can seriously impede an organization's response to the new environment. It is important that leaders be aware that increases in behaviors that lead to conflicts, turnover, absenteeism and poor performance are symptomatic of anxiety. Effective leaders can manage their own anxiety and function at a high level during such periods of change. Such leaders are keenly aware of how their staff and co-workers are functioning and remain focused on the organization's goals, leading the group to success. These leaders are not always in the "official" leadership position of director or supervisor.

Rosamund Stone Zander and Benjamin Zander wrote a chapter in *The Art of Possibility* (Harvard Business School Press, 2000, p.77) called "Leading from Any Chair." They tell a beautiful story of a second violinist in a famous quartet that played their music from memory. The second violinist realized that the violist had forgotten the upcoming passage. Without a moment's hesitation, the second violinist took over playing the violist's melody, "...perfectly in tune and voiced like a viola on an instrument tuned a fifth higher." When asked

afterward how he could possibly have known to play for the violist, he answered “I could see that your third finger was poised over the wrong string, so I knew you must have forgotten what came next.”

Leslie: I love that story too Patty. It is such an important lesson. Everybody in an organization can provide leadership when an organization is significantly challenged, if the goals are clear to everyone and individuals are willing to take responsibility for managing and overcoming their own anxiety to help the organization succeed.

Patty: It is interesting to me that in the article by Heifetz and Laurie, as well as in the Zanders’ book, the leadership principles they write about are so reminiscent of your Hands-on Help columns, published by ADVANCE in 1999. Those were based on the application of Family Systems Theory to leadership and management in the new world of work.

Leslie: Yes, Family Systems Theory, which is a universal theory of human behavior, is very useful for understanding relationship systems. Like families, the workplace is a relationship system in which predictable patterns of behavior can be observed. I have derived principles of leadership based on this theory that guide my thinking about leadership. Interested readers can still see those articles on the ADVANCEforHIM.com Web site.

Patty: During the coming year, we will continue to discuss the implementation of various types of eHIM projects that are transforming HIM practice in all types of health care settings. We will examine the emerging technologies that are fueling the changes, explore the eHIM functions needed in E-health organizations and we will focus on leadership skills that are essential to enabling the HIM profession to meet the challenge of this adaptive change. We look forward to a very thoughtful year and hope our readers will participate in our dialogue. *

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