

## **Solutions Architect: An Emerging Role for HIM Professionals November, 2010**

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LESLIE: As the adoption of EHRs increases, HIM professionals working in EHR vendor organizations are stepping up to help their clients lead implementation teams from design through go-live, and beyond. What a wonderful opportunity for HIM professionals to expand their skills and enhance the HIM “presence” on EHR teams.

PATTY: We have often discussed in this column the new roles that are emerging on the provider side of healthcare, but we haven’t explored new jobs in the vendor arena in as much depth.

LESLIE: Let’s interview Gaurav Chawla, a recent graduate from the University of Illinois at Chicago’s HIM program. Gaurav is a solutions architect who works for Allscripts, a Chicago-based EHR and clinical and business solutions vendor that delivers an integrated platform of solutions to facilitate enhanced collaboration and exchange of critical patient information.

PATTY: Gaurav, it is great to catch up with you. It has been 3 years since you did a summer internship at Care Communications Inc. (CARE) and it sounds like you have been incredibly busy with an exciting career since you left us.

GAURAV: Right after I finished my internship at CARE I joined Allscripts as an implementation consultant for our products used in outpatient departments and physician practices. My first assignment was to help 77 sites get up and running within 4 months. It was a race to the finish, but I immersed myself in learning the product and helped configure the technology to meet the needs of every site. The implementation was successful and completed on time.

LESLIE: That sounds heroic for a first assignment. I understand you received an Excellence Award from your company that year, recognizing your outstanding work on that particular assignment.

GAURAV: Yes, it was a lot of hard work. I just jumped in with lots of curiosity, focused on learning all there is to know about how our product works, and then listened carefully to what the clients wanted to achieve. It is in collaborating closely with the client that we are able to achieve great success.

PATTY: Solutions architect is a new job title for HIM professionals to consider. How did you get this position?

GAURAV: As I gained deeper knowledge of our product and more experience working with clients and implementation teams in a variety of healthcare organizations across the country, I evolved from an implementation consultant, to a senior implementation consultant, to an expert consultant, or as it is called now, a solutions architect.

LESLIE: What exactly does a solutions architect do?

GAURAV: The solutions architect advises our company's implementation teams on the needs of clients, and mentors our consultants and the client's team members as needed.

PATTY: That sounds like a change leadership consultant.

GAURAV: Yes, that's a good description. The solutions architect is responsible for working with new clients to understand their vision and determine which consultants are needed to work on the implementation, and help the client identify the champions within their organizations. It is the whole team that leads the client organization through a successful implementation or change initiative.

PATTY: In essence you are building the right team and guiding it through a change process to achieve the client's vision -- working collaboratively on design, configuration and end-user buy-in and satisfaction.

GAURAV: Yes, and it is also the responsibility of a solutions architect to keep working with clients after their systems are live. As they gain experience with their EHR, and the organization's needs change or new ones emerge, the solutions architect helps the client resolve issues and when necessary tweak or reconfigure the product.

LESLIE: What does a day in the life of Gaurav Chawla look like?

GAURAV: Well for one thing, every day looks different! I talk to my clients every day in person or by phone. Some of my work is done remotely and I do travel quite a bit. About 75 percent of my week is spent at client sites. I am regularly providing guidance to my clients on designing their configuration, modifying workflow, and issues like keeping Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) numbers up to date. I am also expected to know the work flow needs of every specialty. When I am at a client site, I am usually providing demos for users, workflow assessments and recommending configurations to match their needs

LESLIE: What skills are important for success in this type of position?

GAURAV: You need to be a quick learner, a self-starter and a good listener; and you have to have good presentation skills. When I walk into a room at a client site, there are almost always more than four or five people waiting to discuss their needs or concerns. I am constantly in presentation mode, so to speak.

LESLIE: What do you like best about your position?

GAURAV: I like the client interaction. Everyday is an opportunity to meet new people, to learn from them and to help them achieve their goals. Success in this job is about connecting with people to create new futures for them, the organization and ultimately better patient outcomes.

PATTY: What suggestions do you have for HIM professionals who want to pursue a career like yours?

GAURAV: There are several things I did that worked well for me:

1. Get an internship at a company for a month to 6 months. The CARE internship helped me answer questions I had about myself. Questions such as could I take a project from start to finish and figure out what to do on my own? Could I prepare presentations that would engage people? The internship experience gave me the confidence I needed to apply for and take my current job.

2. Work on your presentation skills. If you choose to work on the vendor side you are constantly talking with clients. You have to be able to create and deliver your own presentations so they will be truly customized to the needs and interests of your individual clients. Canned presentations are not an option in this field. I do a lot of demos and I have learned to teach to the product. I also teach about 50 certified workflows and I can use my creativity to determine the best way to present the information to my clients. Whether I create a PowerPoint presentation or draw on a white board is determined in part by the people to whom I am speaking. The white board presentations invite more interaction and creative problem solving. The PowerPoint approach lends itself to large groups or more formal presentations.

LESLIE: Thank you Gaurav for sharing with us and our readers your experience as an HIM professional working in an EHR implementation consulting role. I can see you brought to it your own special touch of genuine interest in and caring for people.

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