

AHIMA Advantage

Electronic Devices Create New Challenges for HIM

Author Q&A: Claudia Tessier, MEd, RHIA

By Chris Dimick

The mobile health (mHealth) revolution has started, and HIM professionals must figure out how to manage information stored on and generated by thousands of electronic devices and applications. Cell and smartphones, wireless tablets, laptops, e-mail, text, and USB drives are increasingly being used by patients and providers to store and exchange health information. In her new book, [*Management and Security of Health Information on Mobile Devices*](#), author Claudia Tessier, RHIA, MEd, discusses how HIM professionals can help employ mHealth devices to improve productivity while not breaching security. *AHIMA Advantage* recently spoke with Tessier about mHealth.

What is this book about?

The book is an introduction to mHealth, or perhaps more appropriately, “the mHealth Revolution” and the impact it will have on healthcare, including health information management. It provides an overview of the 12 application clusters into which the more than 5,000 mHealth applications can be categorized and describes how each of those clusters is being used within healthcare by patients/consumers, clinicians, payers, public health, and educators.

The book also emphasizes how mDevices (such as smartphones and tablets) are creating a communication explosion that will require not just management of health information but of the proliferation of health communications including e-mail, text messages, instant messaging, social networks, observations of daily living, and monitored data. Additionally, it discusses how mHealth stimulates and supports participatory health by involving and linking all healthcare and wellness actors with the patient at the center of our healthcare system.

What are some of the mobile devices you write about in the book?

mDevices, of course, are mainly cell phones and smartphones, but they also include larger, portable wireless devices such as laptops, netbooks, and tablets, as well as smaller, removable devices, such as “smart watches,” DVDs, USB drives, and even sport shoes with wireless communication capabilities. Further, it must be emphasized that in the case of mobile phones, it is not their voice transmission capabilities that are transforming healthcare but rather their ability to access, record, and transmit data—anyplace, anytime, by anyone.

What made you want to write this book? What interested you about the topic?

The evolution of my professional interests, experience, and expertise has taken me from medical transcription to the wider world of healthcare documentation and EMRs, and now to mHealth. mHealth has the potential to not just enhance the capabilities of EMRs but to leapfrog them in terms of appeal, adoption, interoperability, functionality, and usability. Patients/consumers and clinicians are already recognizing and utilizing the potentials of mDevices and mApplications.

What impact does a provider or patient's use of a mobile device have on the HIM department? What is one example of how the HIM professional's job is affected by mobile devices?

The mHealth revolution will require health information managers to expand their role into that of health communication managers. I hope this book will stimulate health information managers to take a leadership role in embracing the potential of mHealth at the same time that they appropriately address the risks that will come along with its benefits.

For example, patients will increasingly want to communicate with providers by e-mail and texting. Physicians are concerned that they might drown in the flood of e-mails and communications. HIM professionals will have to sort such messages by urgency and severity, and find ways to make them easily manageable for clinicians. They will have to ensure confidentiality and appropriate integration into the electronic medical record, and assure that no message gets lost or unanswered.

What type of health information is being stored on mobile devices?

Both personal health information and generic health information may be stored on mobile devices, but it is not just storage that is an issue. It is also the transmission and sharing of this information. Therefore mobile devices facilitate access to, entry of, and transmission of not just voice communications, but also of e-mail, text messages, instant messaging, and social networks.

Additionally, mobile devices are being used to create, access, and communicate personal health records, requiring development of policies and procedures related to the integration of PHRs with traditional health records. For example, in some settings physicians and nurses are storing a subset of the medical record on an mDevice. Others store guidelines and formulary information on smart phones. Of the thousands of applications on iPhones and BlackBerrys, many store decision-making clinical tools.

What mobile device currently used by physicians presents the biggest security risk for HIM professionals? Why?

First, keep in mind that any mobile device—just like any EMR or paper record—can pose a security risk, so adequate policies and procedures, education programs, and sanctions must be appropriately developed and administered for mobile devices just as they are for EMRs and paper records.

At present, it appears that the biggest security concern regarding mobile phones is their camera functions. Thus, efforts must be taken to assure that policies are developed and administered that restrict taking pictures of patients (by staff, volunteers, or visitors) and allow or encourage photos or videos only when they are clinically justified. For example, pictures might help in the care process—think of pictures of dermatologic lesions or videos of a patient's gait in order to both assist in diagnosis as well as to document changes over time.

What are some new roles for HIM professionals that will come with increased use of mobile devices in healthcare?

mDevices will stimulate the evolution of HIM professionals into health communication managers. This is an ideal opportunity for HIM professionals to take a leadership role in designing strategies for mDevice/mApplication implementation in their institutions, while at the same time assuring that both the potential benefits as well as related risk management are appropriately addressed.

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