

# Health Informatics: Critical to Healthcare's Success

By Nancy Borkowski, DBA, CPA, FACHE, FHFMA



As the nation focuses on improving quality of care and reducing costs in the delivery healthcare, health information technology has received increased attention. On February 17, 2009, President Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009; one section of ARRA is called the "Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health Act" or the "HITECH Act". The HITECH Act provides various means of advancing the use of health information technology that allows the suitable exchange and use of health information, thereby establishing a foundation for improving care for each individual in the United States . This increasing reliance on IT in health care raises demand for trained health informatics workers. These "health informaticians" employ not only the use of computers but also the integration of clinical practice guidelines, medical terminologies, and management information and communication systems to support clinical decision-making and the management/business side of healthcare delivery.

The American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) stresses that "...a workforce capable of innovating, implementing, and using health communications and information technology (IT) will be critical to healthcare's success." However, as noted by the AHIMA, the supply of trained health informatics professionals is not keeping pace with the industry's demand. Without an adequate number of health informatics professionals in the field, the AHIMA cautions that the "goal of an improved, interconnected healthcare system may never be met, and the industry may lose much ground in terms of quality safety, and efficiency as it moves toward an electronic future."

Health informatics is an umbrella term that encompasses a wide range of job opportunities. US News and World Report referred to health informatics as "ahead of the curve" career. Over the next decade, the market demand for individuals trained in this field will continue to increase as providers and payors implement electronic health records, and clinicians employ evidence-based medicine with computerized expert systems to guide their practice of care. In addition, statewide initiatives for the development and implementation of health information exchanges (HIEs) continue to grow.



This is well known to Dr. Monica Chiarini Tremblay, Assistant Professor at Florida International University (FIU) and lead faculty for the College of Business Administration's new degree program, MS in Health Informatics and Management Systems. She has both research and consulting experience in healthcare informatics and is working on several federal, state and privately funded grants in the area of health information exchanges, electronic health records and medical passports. "The opportunity is tremendous both for those who want to apply

information systems skills and concepts to the healthcare setting and for those clinicians interested in IT.”

Dr. Tremblay is joined by Dr. Neera Bhansali, the health informatics program's faculty director. Dr. Bhansali recently joined FIU from the H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center and Research Institute where she served as Director of Data Quality and Standards. Her recent book, *Strategic Data Warehousing: Achieving Alignment with Business*, provides data warehouse developers, IT professionals, and administrators with an integrated approach to achieving successful and sustainable alignment of data warehouses and business goals.



FIU's new health informatics degree program integrates two domains: (1) information and communication systems and (2) organizational processes with emphasize on leadership and management principles. This interdisciplinary program has been designed to provide both an academic and practical perspective of the field in an innovative learning environment.

Dr. Bill Hersh, fondly referred to as Oregon Health & Science University's informatics professor, relates that " ... with the growing need for safety and accountability of health care, information will be a critical component for health care delivery, and no one will be better trained to perform and lead those efforts than those trained in informatics."

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