



The Importance of Formal Education in Health Informatics

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Anyone involved in health informatics would be hard pressed to deny the impact governmental programs such as the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), Meaningful Use and other Quality Payment Programs (MACRA/MIPS) have had on the health informatics industry. However, for those personally involved in the work to be accomplished, these directives also provide many challenges. Perhaps foremost is a resource with regards to qualified personnel.

As a discipline, Health Informatics has matured significantly in the past 15-20 years. There has been a greater acceptance of the clinical information systems and methodologies that we espouse. Additionally, the economic importance (both positive and negative) that is felt with the implementation and use of technology in healthcare is clear. Launched in 2011 as part of the Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health (HITECH) Act of 2009 [1], the Electronic Health Record Incentive Program has paid more than \$35 billion in bonuses to “more than 519,000 health care providers” [2].

If you speak to any Hospital CIO, the pressure to participate in these types of programs is mounting. Many will say they need trained and knowledgeable staff to help them carry out federal mandates. The growing maturity of our field and the demonstrated need for competent informatics individuals clearly supports an academic approach to health informatics.

As an academic discipline, health informatics is relatively new and not very common place at universities across the country. However, new programs are enrolling students in Universities across the United States [3,4]. Traditionally at the graduate level, we are seeing new programs at the undergraduate level [5,6].

The American Medical Informatics Association strongly promotes education to prepare “a new generation of clinical, public health, research, and translational bioinformatics informaticians” to ensure the successful “transformation of the American health care system through the deployment and use of advanced clinical computing systems of care” [7].

In his article “The Future of Biomedical Informatics: A Perspective from Academia”, Dr. Edward Shortliffe discusses a brief history of informatics and how the changes our discipline has experienced have influenced the future of informatics education. Dr. Shortliffe concludes “the future of academic informatics is bright” and with

increasing demand, “informatics faculty will have a great deal to offer that will help to transform the understanding of the discipline by the public and key decision makers” [8].

According to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the need for health informatics professionals will show a considerable increase in growth [9]. Even with the number of health informatics related training or degree programs increasing and students continue to graduate, CIOs say that it's not happening fast enough and that there aren't enough qualified people to meet all the demands being placed on them today.

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