For over 20 years, the Health Information Management Association of Australia (HIMAA) has defined the competency standards required for Health Information Managers (HIMs).

The HIMAA Education Committee has been delegated responsibility by the HIMAA Board under its terms of reference to ‘oversee the development and continued refinement of competency standards for health information management’. Health information management can be defined as the practice of acquiring, assessing the completeness of, maintaining, sharing, analysing and protecting electronic and paper-based clinical and administrative information essential to providing quality healthcare. The American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) defines health information management as ‘an allied health profession that is responsible for ensuring the availability, accuracy, and the protection of the clinical information that is needed to deliver healthcare services and to make appropriate healthcare decisions’ (AHIMA 2010).

What are competency standards?
The National Competency Standards Framework for Pharmacists in Australia (Pharmaceutical Society of Australia, 2010: 3) states that ‘competency standards describe the skills, attitudes and other attributes (including values and beliefs) attained by an individual based on knowledge (gained through study at university) and experience (gained through subsequent practice) which together enable the individual to practise effectively’. Health information management competency standards are of critical importance because they define the breadth and depth of the health information management knowledge domain, and the relevant skills, attitudes and attributes that HIMs possess and can bring to the health sector. HIMs are professionals in health information management.

Purpose of the competency standards
The purpose of the health information management entry-level competency standards is to:

- Use for health information management course accreditation
- Provide a framework for professional development

In 2010, the HIMAA Education Committee commenced a review of existing entry-level standards (last revised in 2001) to ensure they remain contemporary and reflect the changing requirements of the profession and the health sector. The competency standards guide the health information management tertiary program content and are essential in ensuring the continued supply of graduates with the necessary professional skills and attributes. Refinement of the health information management competency standards has included a review of the AHIMA standards (AHIMA 2011) and other international health information management competency standards (CHIMA, 2010; IFHRO 2009; IMIA 2010; IMIA 2009). The professional competencies define the skills and knowledge domain of the profession at the entry level. The competencies provide a framework for course curriculum design and content and enable assessment of student and new graduate performance. They are a key component of the HIMAA accreditation process for education programs in health information management. It is a requirement that health information management professional entry courses are in ‘substantial’ compliance with the competency standards to be accredited by the HIMAA. Provisional accreditation is awarded when there is only ‘moderate’ compliance. Graduates of courses that are not accredited are not eligible for full membership of HIMAA (HIMAA, 2011). The concept of ‘substantial’ versus ‘moderate’ compliance is a critical aspect. What do we mean by ‘substantial’ compliance? Is this compliance with 80% of the standards, or is it some other measure? If so, which standards are less important? Which are more important? There is a further challenge for entry-level Masters programs, where students enter the course with a prior undergraduate degree and relevant work experience. Many of these students will already have achieved competence in some of the standards. There are no easy answers to the questions posed. It is the role of the Education Committee, based on the review by the accreditation team (comprised of experienced HIMs, including a member with relevant university experience) to decide on the awarding of the accreditation. The Committee considers the course ‘in total’ and whether the graduates have the requisite knowledge, skills and attributes to be considered a HIM.
Domains and subdomains

The competencies that make up the HIMAA health information management entry-level competency standards are organised into domains and subdomains. The domains are categories covering a broad theme or branch of learning with the subdomains relating to a particular topic within a domain. The competency tasks within each subdomain are specific competency statements for entry-level/beginning professionals as they apply to management of health information systems and services. For the entry-level competency tasks, a learning level has been allocated that reflects the level of learning based on the revised Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning Domains. The domains and subdomains are described below.

A. Generic professional skills

This domain relates to basic professional skills with which health information management graduates should be equipped to enable them to fulfil a role as an entry level HIM practitioner. The subdomains cover the following attributes:

- Communication skills – the application of written, verbal, presentation, and interpersonal skills appropriate to HIM practice.
- Organisation and engagement
- Information communication technology (ICT) literacy and knowledge management skills
- Teamwork – within the work unit and as part of a multidisciplinary team
- Problem-solving and decision-making
- Lifelong learning
- Ethical behaviour
- Social and cultural awareness.

B. Health information and records management

This domain relates to the management of health data and records, including structure in both manual and electronic formats, data collection, healthcare record functions, storage and retrieval, retention and legal aspects of managing health information, standards and regulations for documentation. The subdomains cover the following components of health data management:

- Health data and records – client and provider identity management; structure, content and standards; management of data and records (both manual and electronic systems); healthcare record functions; health information sources
- Healthcare information standards and governance – standards and regulations for documentation of health information content and information exchange; legal aspects of health information: accreditation/certification standards; governance of health information.

C. Language of medicine

This domain relates to the knowledge of medical science and medical vocabularies, terms essential to the understanding of information contained in the health record and related health information systems. The subdomains cover the following components of the language of medicine:

- Medical science – basic structure and function (anatomy and physiology) of the human body, including disease and disease process; procedures and treatments; pharmacology, pathology, radiology and other clinical investigations
- Medical vocabularies – medical terms and vocabularies associated with body systems and medical specialties used in diagnosis, treatment and management of health conditions.

D. Healthcare terminologies and classification

This domain relates to code systems, clinical terminology and health classification systems and the ability to undertake clinical coding. It also encompasses the application of these systems to casemix management and funding methodologies. The subdomains cover the following components:

- Code systems, clinical terminologies and classification – health care terminologies, nomenclatures and classifications; use case for common code systems such as ICD-10-AM, ACHI, DSM, SNOMED CT, etc.
- Clinical coding – applying clinical coding principles and skills - abstraction, assignment of codes to inpatient episodes of care for morbidity and mortality reporting
- Casemix management and activity based funding methodologies - casemix classification; payment systems; funding models; policy and funding guidelines; auditing.

E. Research methods

This domain encompasses research methods such as qualitative and quantitative research, research and survey design and techniques, evaluation, research ethics, data collection, data and statistical principles of analysis on healthcare data, statistics and epidemiology, data reporting and presentation, research reports, health infor-
The subdomain covers the following components:
- Healthcare statistics and research – research design/methods; epidemiology concepts; research ethics; data collection and analysis; and writing up research

F. Health services organisation and delivery
This domain relates to the function and organisation of healthcare systems, including quality, safety, risk management and performance management for health information. The subdomains cover the following components:
- Healthcare delivery systems – structure and function of healthcare system and impact on health information; health information systems for various models of care; role and function of other healthcare professionals; use of data and statistics for resource utilisation
- Quality and safety management and performance improvement management – quality and safety principles and management; quality assessment and management tools; risk management; outcomes management; benchmarking and accreditation/certification standards.

G. Health information law and ethics
This domain relates to the concepts, principles and application of legislative requirements and ethical obligations for access, privacy and confidentiality of personal health information. The subdomains cover the following components:
- Healthcare privacy, confidentiality, disclosure, legal and ethical practice – access and release of health information in accordance with legal and regulatory requirements; ethical collection and use of health information (e.g. organisation-wide privacy; right to information, confidentiality and security principles); policies and procedures for health information management and systems, including infrastructure.

H. eHealth
This domain encompasses health information system and technology terms and concepts, health informatics, healthcare system applications and information flows, communication technologies, data security, data, information and file structures, data modelling and process mapping, the information systems lifecycle, systems development and implementation, database management, systems integration and information exchange, electronic healthcare records, electronic personal healthcare records and clinical and administrative decision support systems. The subdomains cover the following components:
- Information and communication technologies – use of technology; standards for interchange and interoperability
- Data security – data integrity and validation techniques; security measures; monitoring and auditing; data recovery procedures
- Health information systems and health informatics – various applications used in healthcare, including public health and consumer informatics, telehealth;

information systems evaluation, information storage mediums; conversion of information; data, information and file structures; data modelling and process mapping; database architecture and design; systems development life cycle; clinical and administrative decision support systems.

I. Health information services organisation and management
This domain relates to the theories and concepts of management. This includes organisational behaviour, human resource management, financial and business management, strategic planning, project management, leadership, workflow analysis and management, and change management. The subdomains cover the following components:
- Human resource management – human resource management strategies; employee orientation, education and training; team building; performance management and development; work health and safety
- Business/operations management – management principles; strategic, business and operational planning; workflow management, analysis and design; organisational benchmarking; meetings management; change management; risk management
- Project management - project management techniques; process redesign and workflow management
- Financial and resource management - financial management; accounting and budgeting principles; budget development; supply management; cost/benefit analysis.

Now and into the future
The HIMAA Education Committee plans to develop intermediate and advanced level health information management competency standards in 2013/2014. It is expected that this development will also mean some revision to the entry-level standards, particularly in relation to the ‘learning levels’. The Committee will seek input from HIMAA members and other stakeholders in the development of these standards.

The competency standards are also being used by HIMAA to guide the professional development activities of the Association. For example, HIMAA National Conferences now require authors to address the theme of the conference within the context of one or more of the health information management competency domains. While this is a small step, it serves to highlight the link between professional development and the competency domains and the requirement for members of the profession to maintain their competence.

An ongoing challenge will be how to ensure that the standards remain contemporaneous and reflect the competencies required of HIMs. This is all the more challenging, given the breadth of employment settings and diversity of roles in which HIMs are employed. It is critical that the profession and the HIMAA continue to review and revise the competency standards for HIMs,
both for the present and into the future because they define our profession. It is also crucial that HIMs ensure that they remain competent given the dynamic nature of the health care sector and the changes we are experiencing.

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References

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