

FAST FACTS

HEALTH INFORMATION MANAGEMENT (HIM)

Are you searching for the formula to succeed in healthcare, but hands-on, direct patient care is not for you? Then consider a career with tremendous potential—healthcare and information technology.

The Health Information Management (HIM) field places you right where the expanding arena of healthcare meets the cutting edge of technology and healthcare informatics. As an HIM professional, you are the expert on patient data that doctors, nurses, and other providers rely on to perform their jobs. By maintaining, collecting, and analyzing health information, your work makes an important contribution to the delivery of quality care.

1. What is a Registered Health Information Technician (RHIT) and what type of work does an RHIT perform?

RHITs hold many diverse roles, yet all share a common purpose: providing reliable and valid information that drives the healthcare industry. They are specialists in administering information systems, managing medical records, and coding information for reimbursement and research. Health information management professionals are uniquely qualified to:

- * Ensure health information is complete and available to legitimate users
- * Code and classify data for reimbursement
- * Analyze information necessary for decision support
- * Protect patient privacy and provide information security
- * Enhance the quality and uses for data within healthcare
- * Administer health information computer systems
- * Comply with standards and regulations regarding health information
- * Prepare health data for accreditation surveys
- * Analyze clinical data for research and public policy

Some positions available to a RHIT are as a:

- * Health Data Analyst
- * Insurance Claims Analyst
- * Records Technician Specialist
- * Clinical Coding Specialist
- * Physician Practice Manager
- * Patient Information Coordinator

Characteristics of a HIM professional

The ideal Future HIM professional is one who:

Has average to above intelligence coupled with common sense.

Is capable of independent thought and assumes responsibility

Is interested in computer science and information technology.

Have excellent communication skills.

Realizes that change and uncertainty is the norm.

Have the flexibility, diversity, and ability to learn new skills quickly.

Has a questioning attitude and tolerance for ambiguity.

Is tactful, diplomatic and discreet.

Have critical-thinking, problem-solving and decision-making capabilities.

Demonstrates excellent interpersonal skills and a positive, cooperative attitude.

Is organized and detail-oriented.

2. How do I become an RHIT?

The first step begins with formal education. You need to complete an associate degree program in health information management offered at numerous accredited institutions across the country. The HIM program at CCC is an accredited institution.

If you're a high school student considering an HIM career, the following courses provide a good foundation: business, computer science, English, math, biology, and chemistry.

If you've already earned a college degree and possess the prerequisites, you can earn a postgraduate certificate or second degree in HIM.

When you have finished your HIM training, the next step is to successfully complete a certification exam. Upon passing the exam, you are permitted to use the credential RHIT behind your last name to designate your professional level. Earning a credential validates your competence as an HIM professional to employers and the public.

3. Where does an RHIT find employment?

RHITs enjoy a broad selection of job opportunities and options for professional growth. The types of employment opportunities are endless, limited only by the RHIT's imagination drive and willingness to take risks. Over 70% of RHITs work in health information management/services (also known as medical record) departments in hospitals. However, with the expanding uses of health care information, more RHITs are finding opportunities for employment in the following areas:

Physician offices/practices, regional and state registries (tumor), ambulatory care clinics, outpatient surgery centers, long term care facilities, mental health facilities, psychiatric hospitals, industrial clinics, accounting firms, law offices, medical equipment sales, home health care, health maintenance organizations, education, state and federal health agencies, private industry, centers of research, hospice center, college/university health centers, insurance companies, and medical software firms.

4. What type of salary can an RHIT expect to receive?

On top of strong job prospects, competitive salaries also await HIM graduates. More than half of new HIM graduates with an associate's degree jump right in and earn \$29,000 to \$35,000 annually. And these figures are just averages—many HIM professionals report salaries upward from here. You can visit the American Health Information Management Association's Web site at www.AHIMA.org to see the results of AHIMA's latest member salary and profile survey.

5. How is the job market outlook?

Good! The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics cites health information technology as one of the 10 fastest growing occupations in the US. All CCC graduates who have wanted to be employed as RHITs have been offered a job and most begin work immediately after graduation. It is important to note that most of CCC's HIM graduates desire employment in the Cleveland area, therefore, this job market is more competitive. If you are able to relocate to an area where there is a greater shortage of RHITs, then your employment opportunities are more widely expanded.

6. How long is the program?

Full time student: Two (2) years. Five consecutive semesters. Part-time students will take 4-5 years depending on how many classes the student takes per semester.

7. Briefly describe the Health Information Management Program.

The Health Information Management Program is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Health Informatics and Information Management Education (CAHIIM) in collaboration with the American Health Information Management Association. The goal of the Health Information Management/Technology Program is to provide an educational experience within the framework of professional standards. Student accomplishments are reflected by their efforts in assuming responsibility for learning. The curriculum is structured around specific course objectives and is scheduled to balance student needs, instructor's time, and the availability of desired experiences. The staff is dedicated to the maintenance of highest possible standards of professional excellence as well as personal growth and the development of an open and honest learning relationship with the students.

8. Can I transfer credits from another college or university?

Generally, yes. Students are encourage to see a CCC counselor after their transcripts have been forwarded to CCC. All CCC counselors can give you specific information about course substitution, course transfers, etc

9. Can I complete the program on a part-time basis? Will I be able to work while attending the program? Is the program offered in the evenings or weekends?

Students who can only attend college on a part-time basis are welcomed into the program, but it must be understood that it will take more than two years to complete the program. Before a part-time student is eligible to take a certain course he/she must meet all the prerequisites. It is highly recommended that a part-time student complete all of the degree-required courses in the HIM curriculum (EXCEPT the HIM courses) before entering the program. This will increase successful program completion and satisfaction. The HIM-numbered courses for part time students attending college in the evenings and on the weekends begins every fall semester at the Metro Campus and every-other spring at the Eastern Campus. These courses should be taken two at a time during the last two years. The practicum experiences are not available during the evenings or weekends and the students will need to make special arrangements in their work schedules to accommodate this part of the curriculum during the final two semesters.

Students in the program have found having a part-time and/or full-time job manageable. This is something you will want to discuss with the HIM faculty. Most students who need to work do so on a part-time basis and complete the HIM program in 3-5 years. You also should consider working on second or third shift when it is time for your practicum experience and your employer needs to understand that your schedule may vary each semester and the need to be flexible is a must.

All HIM courses are only offered at the Metropolitan campus with some exceptions. The majority of other required courses are offered during weekdays, weekends or in the evenings at all three campuses and a student may take these courses at the campus of his/her choice. All required courses in the HIM curriculum (EXCEPT HIM courses) may be completed before entrance into the Health Information Management program.

10. Is financial aid available?

Financial assistance is available through the College in the form of scholarships, grants, or loans. The College suggests that all forms for financial aid application be submitted at least six weeks prior to registration. Application forms are available in the Financial Aid Office at each campus. Questions regarding financial aid should be directed to the financial aid office at Eastern campus 987-2211, Metro campus 987-4100 or Western campus 987-5100.

11. Where can I obtain additional information regarding the profession?

You may obtain additional information from the Health Care Enrollment Center at 216-987-4247. They will be glad to send you a program packet about the Health Information Management Program. There is also information about the program in the College catalog.

Check the campus resource center or your neighborhood library for professional journals, directories and trade publications in the specific field you are exploring.

Talk to people who work in the HIM Field. (Do they enjoy their jobs? If given a chance would they do it over again?) Call companies that employ people in the field you are researching. Let them know you are only seeking information and advice. Develop and take along a list of questions. After each interview, ask if there is anyone else that can help you.

Interesting Web sites that might help you with your decision:

American Health Information Management Association <http://www.ahima.org>
Cuyahoga Community College <http://www.tri-c.edu/>
Student Information: <http://healthinformationcareers.com>

12. How do I apply or begin taking courses in the Health Information Technology Program?

Please contact the HEALTH CAREER ENROLLMENT CENTER at 216/987-4247 and request a Health Information Management Program application packet.

Make an appointment with a CCC counselor. The counselor will discuss your career goals with you and then help you plan a program of related courses that will guide you toward your career in Health Information Technology. A CCC counselor can give specific information about course substitution, course transfers, etc.

The Health Information Management Program uses a "rolling admission" process for admittance into the program. After a student has submitted his/her folder containing the documentation of fulfilling all required admission requirements, these requirements will be verified. If the student has met all the admission requirements, then the student's folder will be dated and the student will be sent a letter of acceptance informing the student of the next available opening. A new class of students begins every fall semester. If the packet is incomplete it will be returned to the applicant. Students must achieve or complete the following before applying to the program:

- a) Submission of a completed Cuyahoga Community College Application
- b) Submission of a completed Health Careers Application
- c) Submission of official high school transcript or GED certificate. (Request the high school or GED office to forward the transcript to the Office of Admission and Records)
- d) Submission of transcripts from all colleges or universities attended, including CCC. Your application will not be considered complete until all external transcripts have been evaluated by the CCC Admission and Records Department which takes 4-6 weeks
- e) Candidates must achieve a minimum of a 2.5 cumulative grade point average (based on a 4.0 scale) for the following courses (or transfer of comparable courses from another college or university):
 - BIO 1100, Introduction to Biological Chemistry
 - BIO 2330, Anatomy and Physiology I
 - ENG 1010, College Composition I
 - IT 1010, Introduction to Microcomputers Applications
 - MA-1020, Medical Terminology I

- f) Upon acceptance to the program and prior to clinical practice, the student will be required to submit evidence of good health.
- g) All information should be sent to:
The Health Careers Enrollment Center
Cuyahoga Community College S&T 193
2900 Community College Avenue
Cleveland, Ohio 44115
Attn: HIM Program

When these requirements are met and verified, the student's folder will be dated and the student will be placed in the next available program opening. A letter will be sent to the student informing him/her of his/her status.

13. Is there a Bachelor Degree available for the Health Information Management Field and can I transfer my credits from this program to the four-year institution?

Students who have an Associate Degree in Applied Science with a major in Health Information Management from Cuyahoga Community College can transfer to any HIM bachelor-degree program within the United States. **Ohio State University** in Columbus has a 4-year traditional degree program that accepts our graduates as third-year students. **The University of Toledo** also accepts our HIM graduates into their HIM bachelor-degree program as third-year students who can do their entire Junior and Senior years online as distance learners or take traditional classes on campus.

Most HIM bachelor degree programs do require "bridge courses" to bring the student up to the level of a full Junior in a 4-year institution. Usually there are not more than five bridge courses required. The student will need to discuss the bridge course requirements with the HIM program managers at the 4-year college or university.

CRIMINAL BACKGROUND CHECKS

Many healthcare facilities have begun to require criminal background checks for their employees. The Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations Hospital Accreditation Standards Manual requires hospitals to implement "a process to ensure that a person's qualifications are consistent with his/her job responsibilities." This standard "applies to staff, students and volunteers," and it further states that the hospital is responsible for verifying "the following according to law, regulation or hospital policy: information on criminal background." As such, Cuyahoga Community College students who participate in professional practice experiences in the health information management program may be required to undergo a criminal background check prior to placement at the facility. In addition, the facility may require students to undergo a physical examination (on-site at the facility or by the student's primary care provider) prior to beginning the professional practice experience that may include drug screening. Students may be required to incur costs associated with the criminal background check and/or the drug screening.

PASS/NO PASS GRADE OPTION

Students can elect up to 12 credits taken Pass/No Pass (P/NP) to fulfill degree requirements at Tri-C. **However, courses used as pre-requisites or core courses for the Health Information Management Program(s) must have a traditional letter grade.** This means that all courses within the HIM degree sequence must have a letter grade including the general education courses required for graduation.