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AHIOS Launches Certificate Program to Promote Excellence in the Release of Patient Information

—Certification Ensures Mastery of Health Information Management Fundamentals—

BOSTON, Mass., November 21, 2005 — The Association of Health Information Outsourcing Services (AHIOS) has begun administering a rigorous exam that tests its member employees' knowledge about how to protect the confidentiality of patients' personal health information when that information is released to requestors.

An employee who receives a passing grade of 80 percent or higher will receive the designation of Certified Release of Information Specialist (CRIS), which indicates mastery of the field of release of information (ROI).

ROI specialists handle the complex and time-consuming task of releasing medical records to a variety of requestors, including insurance companies, government review and regulatory agencies, researchers, attorneys and patients themselves. ROI specialists must log, verify and track requests; retrieve information from multiple locations and in many different formats; confirm the requestor has a right to the information; then reproduce, package and mail the documents. A critical part of the process is determining the minimum information necessary to meet the request so that sensitive information is not needlessly released.

“Because ROI is so complicated — and the liability threats so significant — the majority of hospitals outsource this necessary function to ensure they have access to staff with quality control, technology and healthcare expertise,” explained Bonnie Coffey, chair of the AHIOS committee that created the testing program and the president of CopyMed, Inc., and Attain Document Services, Inc.

“ROI specialists protect some of the most personal information that exists on an individual, and that’s a huge responsibility — to both the patient and the hospital,” Coffey said. “The CRIS designation will be a testament to their understanding of the complexities and risks associated with ROI and their ability to ensure that only authorized requestors see only the information they’re authorized to see.”

The written exam includes a broad range of questions, covering the contents of a medical record to the components of a valid authorization for a record’s release. The largest section of the exam asks test takers what they would do when presented with a wide variety of hypothetical situations — for example, a sheriff asking for a patients medical records as part of a criminal investigation.

“In any single day, an ROI specialist faces dozens of different release requests, and he or she has to be on top of a huge body of knowledge that dictates how each request is handled,” said AHIOS president Richard C. Logan, MBA, RHIA, who is also president of Medical Record Associates, Inc. “It’s a high-stakes and very difficult process. The CRIS certificate program promotes the standards of excellence that are so critical to this industry.”

About the Association of Health Information Outsourcing Services

Established in 1996, AHIOS promotes, strengthens and enhances the health information management outsourcing industry while ensuring excellence in the handling and dissemination of confidential patient-identifiable information. Its goals are to increase awareness of the value, importance and complexity of the industry’s services; establish standards of excellence for the industry of health information management outsourcing; pursue fair and equitable treatment of the industry through legislative, regulatory and legal processes; and create educational and networking opportunities for members.

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