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A Global Perspective on the Value of HIM Certifications: An IFHIMA Position Paper

About IFHIMA

The International Federation of Health Information Management Associations (IFHIMA) is a non-governmental organization that has been in official relations with the World Health Organization (WHO) for 43 years. The IFHIMA Executive Board has representatives from each of the six WHO regions. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, IFHIMA's triennial Congresses regularly drew attendees from 50+ countries.

IFHIMA members hail from 30 countries and include Health Information Managers (HIMs) and Classification Specialists (CSs). IFHIMA representatives serve on various WHO committees, task teams, and reference groups.

Why Certification Matters

In many industries, certification conveys competency, skills, commitment, and abilities. Certification typically indicates that an individual meets high standards, is knowledgeable in their industry, and has been deemed competent to perform professional duties.

Certification is common throughout various branches of healthcare, including among physicians, nurses, allied health fields, pharmacists, and specialists. Other industries also rely on certification to ensure that workers are properly trained and qualified, including accountants, educators, architects, engineers, technicians, and scores of other professions.

Many people benefit from certification:



Professionals can demonstrate their commitment to the profession and education, gaining an advantage in their careers that can translate to better opportunities with higher salaries.



Businesses can reduce risk by hiring professionals who have proven they meet an independent standard of knowledge.



The public can be better served by professionals who have demonstrated their competence and abilities.

Health institutions and organizations rely on a variety of workers to manage critical health information functions. In many countries these individuals have no standardized training and certification. While these workers may be competent in their own areas, they lack the consistent training, best practices, and expertise to properly manage the growing volumes of health information. This challenge grows as technology continues to evolve.

Definitions of “Certification”

Within the health information realm, here are just a few examples of what certification means:

International Federation of Health Information Management Associations (IFHIMA):

“Certification is generally used to indicate a person has achieved a defined level of proficiency by the awarding organization, and it demonstrates a person has the specific skills employers seek, dedication to excellence, and the capacity to perform at the required levels.”¹

European Federation for Medical Informatics Association (EFMI):

“Certification is a credentialing process that demonstrates and honors qualifications that an individual can perform a specific professional role or set of tasks.”²

Commission on Certification for Health Informatics and Information Management (CCHIIM) Candidate Guide, 2021:

“Certification is a means for showing that a certified professional possesses the required knowledge and skills necessary for optimal performance of his or her job.”³

Canadian College of Health Information Management (CCHIM):

“Certification signals to employers that a health information professional is credible and has demonstrated commitment to the industry.”⁴

Health Information Management Association Australia (HIMAA):

“Certification through the ... Professional Credentialing Scheme” enables HIM professionals’ participation “in professional development throughout their careers to ensure their knowledge is ever expanding, allowing for increased scope in responsibilities and ongoing competency.”⁵

The Value of Certification for the HIM Profession

As the stewards of health information, HIM professionals must be cognizant of multiple stakeholders’ requirements and needs, such as:

- Healthcare providers who need accurate information to treat patients.
- Individuals who expect data privacy while accessing care across settings.
- Public health entities that seek to understand emerging health trends and challenges.
- Global agencies such as the World Health Organization (WHO) that need accurate and timely morbidity and mortality data to monitor global health status, investments, and outcomes.^{6,7}

In short, HIM professionals are key to producing, managing, and protecting patient data at every level. As stated in IFHIMA’s 2021 whitepaper, [Revisiting Information Governance](#)⁸: “HIM professionals possess the requisite information management knowledge and skills to positively impact the management of information across the entire healthcare setting.”

As a result, many HIM professionals seek some sort of certification. Several countries’ HIM associations have developed their own certification standards and now issue credentials or certifications to individual professionals. These actions seek to elevate the profession and protect patients and their data while improving healthcare delivery.

Certification also provides transparency and creates trust between employers and professionals. Certified professionals can gain an advantage in negotiating salary and other benefits.

Michelle Millen, MSCPM, RHIT of AHIMA’s Commission on Certification for Health Informatics and Information Management (CCHIIM) notes that credentials are important for HIM professionals because they can help validate competencies and skills that professionals can transport to new employment opportunities. Similarly, Sally Gibbs, MA, RHIA, CCS of Sutter Health - California explains that certification, “really opens up doors and opportunities that you have no idea are there.”⁹

Dana DeMasters, MN, RN, CHPS found that obtaining her Certified in Healthcare Privacy and Security credential was “incredibly helpful” throughout her career. Preparing for the certification “created a solid foundation for my HIPAA compliance career and instilled confidence as my role evolved,” while providing “immediate recognition” that she had the experience she needed for advancement. She explains, “This may not have been readily evident otherwise, as my education background as a registered nurse was not typical for a privacy or information security officer.” Overall, DeMasters notes, “Certification readily communicates that I have a credential that is unique and specific...and demonstrates a certain level of expertise.”¹⁰

Credential Versus Certification

A credential is the highest level of proof supporting an individual’s educational or professional achievement.¹² A credential is usually issued by a third party with authoritative power and is proof of an individual’s qualification or competencies in a given subject or examination. An individual must possess specific requirements to sit for a credential examination. Credentials verify that an HIM professional has achieved competency in the subject matter.

Certification is another form of validating an individual’s educational or professional achievement. It is awarded to an individual to objectively quantify that they are qualified to perform a job or task, usually through educational achievement.

Credential and certification are sometimes interchangeable, but a point of difference is that a credential assures that the individual with this credential met the established standard and competencies set forth by the credentialing body.¹³

IFHIMA’s Position:

HIM certification will elevate the profession and empower healthcare transformation.

IFHIMA believes that HIM certification is essential to elevating the profession and empowering healthcare transformation by using professionals with the knowledge and expertise to better manage and protect healthcare data.

IFHIMA recognizes, however, that each nation has unique needs, funding models, hierarchies, goals, and considerations.

IFHIMA urges each nation’s HIM association to advocate for the relevance and importance of certifications and credentials that meet their specific situation, all with an eye toward professionalizing HIM expertise.

Robust HIM certification will share some commonalities across nations, as outlined in IFHIMA’s 2022 whitepaper, [Examining Today’s HIM Workforce with Recommendations for Elevating the Profession](#).¹¹ For example, HIM certification may:

- Include technology and data analysis in educational programs.
- Include information from a variety of sources to improve baseline skills and prepare for data analysis and presentation.

- Standardize HIM educational requirements, thereby creating a competent workforce to meet national or regional goals.
- Delineate the required skills for each job within the HIM profession, along with corresponding compensation levels.
- Have the agility to evolve along with healthcare technology to prepare the workforce for an ever-changing landscape.

How IFHIMA Supports Members in Pursuing Certifications

IFHIMA does not recommend a single global certification: IFHIMA does however urge member nations to pursue certification that aligns with their country's own needs and goals.

In many nations, professional associations have developed assessment-based certification or certificate programs. Increasingly, professional associations are working across borders to offer guidance and best practices to nations pursuing similar goals. IFHIMA can help facilitate these connections.

IFHIMA also supports its member countries in developing certifications by:

Facilitating networking for National Member Associations to collaborate and learn from peer associations.

Curating a list of contacts for associations that have created certification programs.

Expanding the IFHIMA Body of Knowledge to address the credentialing and certification requirements of member nations, thus creating a single, consolidated reference point for interested parties and members.

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Appendix:

How some IFHIMA member nations approach HIM education and certification.

Each member nation's approach varies depending on their unique goals, funding models, hierarchies, and population needs. Learn how some IFHIMA nations manage education and certification.

Africa

Ghana

The Ghanaian HIM profession is fully recognized as a professional group in the healthcare sector of Ghana.

In Ghana, a considerable number of universities and colleges (both private and public) are accredited by the National Accreditation Board to offer formal educational training programs in HIM. The National Accreditation Board (NAB) is the governmental agency mandated to accredit all university/college courses, programs, and practices in Ghana.

These institutions offer certificates, diplomas, bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, and PhDs in HIM. The curriculum encompasses courses such as epidemiology, pathophysiology, disease coding and classification, anatomy and physiology, medical terminologies, medical records management, information security and compliance, biostatistics, management information systems, etc.

The admission process, prerequisites, and period of study vary between universities.

On the aspects of licensing, the Allied Health Professions Council (AHPC) regulates the practice of HIM and licenses HIM practitioners. The eligibility requirements for licensing of practitioners by the Council include successful completion of an HIM program in an accredited University or College followed by a one-year mandatory internship program at an accredited health facility. The next step is application and registration for licensing examination set by the AHPC at a fee.

Already qualified or practicing HIM professionals are also required to renew their license each year by paying an annual renewal fee, acquiring an acceptable minimum

credit points from Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programs, and attending and adhering to all ethical considerations of the Council and the Ministry of Health.

Kenya

In Kenya, HIM courses are available at several levels, each requiring a different period of study:

- Certificate in Health Records Management (2 years)
- Diploma in Health Records (3 years)
- BSc. in Health Records and Information Management (4 years)
- MSc. in Health Information Management (2 years)
- PhD in Health Information Management (minimum 3 years)

These courses are run by six universities and over 20 mid-level colleges.

On the aspect of regulating and certification of the practice of HIM, the Health Records and Information Management Board was recently commissioned to operate as the governmental agency responsible for regulating the practice of HIM/Medical Records in Kenya. This was enabled by the Health Records and Information Management Act passed in 2016.

Nigeria

Nigeria has tertiary institutions offering Health Information Management courses at various levels: Professional Diploma, Higher National Diploma, BSc., MSc., and PhD in HIM.

Nigeria has three categories of HIM education regulatory bodies that regulate both private and public institutions:

- National University Commission
- Health Records Officers Registration Board of Nigeria
- National Board for Technical Education

The Health Records Officers' Registration Board of Nigeria (HRORBN) is a federal agency with the mandate to control and regulate the practice of Health Records Management in Nigeria and matters relating thereto, including certification of professionals.

The functions of the Board amongst others include determining the standards of knowledge and skill attainable to HIM professionals and improving on those standards. Also, they are responsible for maintaining and periodically publishing a register of HIM professionals.

The Board conducts examinations in health records management and awards certificates or diplomas to successful candidates as appropriate.

After acquiring tertiary education and certification, professionals are mandated to apply for a practitioner's license from the HROBRN. The applicant must pass an examination before gaining certification to practice.

Tanzania

The Tanzania Health Records and Information Association (THERIA) supports HIM activities in Tanzania. THERIA was established in 2006 to bring together national teams committed to developing and administering the use of accurate health Information.

Currently, there are three allied health schools offering a diploma in Health Records and Information Technology and two offering a diploma in Health Information Science. Due to high demand from health facilities, the Ministry of Health and some private sector organizations seek to increase the number of these schools.

In Tanzania there are two higher education institutions that offer both bachelor's and master's degrees in Health Information Management and Health Information Science.

Tanzania currently has no professional board for licensing and certifying HIM professionals. About 400 HIM professionals are employed throughout the public and private sectors.

Uganda

Until the 2012/2013 academic year, no health training institution in Uganda offered medical records and health informatics training opportunities at any formal level technically approved by the National Council for Higher Education.

Today, the Uganda Institute of Allied Health and Management Sciences Mulago is the only mandated institution to train both certificate and diploma levels of Medical Records Officers.

A collective effort was channeled to secure the best interests of Medical Records Officers. These efforts produced progressive results and the Ugandan government since realized the need for proper medical records management by introducing a structured medical records program in most health training institutions. Currently, the programs run at certificate and diploma levels. Despite the nonexistence of a bachelor's degree program specific to HIM/Medical Records in Uganda, a master's degree program is offered at Makerere University College of Health Sciences.

On the aspect of certification and licensing, the Allied Health Professions Council (AHPC) is the regulatory body that licenses Medical Records Officers in Uganda.

Ugandans have resolved to leverage partnership opportunities for support in terms of scholarship and any other training opportunities so that professionals can further improve the medical records management standards in the country.

Americas

Barbados

The Barbados Health Information Management Association (BHIMA) is the professional organization for health information management professionals.

Two tertiary institutions in Barbados offer formal educational training programs for HIM professionals. The associate degree level of the Health Information Management curriculum combines the disciplines of medical records management, information technology, healthcare, human resources, and law. The program is very diverse and extensively covers the principles and practices of acquiring, analyzing, and protecting electronic and traditional health information essential to patient safety, confidentiality, and quality healthcare. In addition to the associate degree, the institution offers professional development courses in Medical Coding and Classification.

One institution also offers a bachelor's degree in Health Sciences with a concentration in Health Informatics.

Canada

The Canadian College of Health Information Management establishes accreditation standards for educational institutions and certification standards for HIM professionals. Four certifications are available:

- Certified Health Information Management (CHIM)
- Certified Terminology Standards Specialist (CTSS)
- Certified Classification and Coding Specialist (CCCS)
- Certified Clinical Documentation Improvement Specialist (CCDIS)

Three of these require successful completion of a national certification examination to use the professional designation. Practice areas tested vary by examination. Each has a set of eligibility requirements, including a fee, which must be met to apply for the examination.

To retain certification, mandatory maintenance requirements involve participating in continuing professional education (CPE) over a CPE cycle, renewal of Canadian Health Information Management Association (CHIMA) membership, and upholding the professional code of ethics.

Jamaica

The Jamaican Health Information Management Association (JaHIMA) represents all HIM professionals. There is one tertiary institution that was established to mandate formal training for HIM professionals. Two accredited courses are available:

- Asc. degree in Health Information Technology
- BSc. degree in Health Information Management

These courses are certified and accredited by the University Council of Jamaica (UCJ).

United States

The American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) offers eight certification exams for HIM professionals that issue the following credentials:

- Registered Health Information Technician (RHIT)
- Registered Health Information Administrator (RHIA)
- Certified Coding Associate (CCA)

- Certified Coding Specialist (CCS)
- Certified Coding Specialist - Physician-based (CCS-P)
- Certified Documentation Improvement Practitioner (CDIP)
- Certified Health Data Analyst (CHDA)
- Certified in Healthcare Privacy and Security (CHPS)

Individuals who successfully pass a certification exam receive a professional designation (credential). Eligibility, prerequisite, and recertification requirements vary by credential, but all must obtain a specific number of continuing education units relevant to the HIM field over a two-year cycle. AHIMA charges a fee for certification and recertification.

Additionally, AHIMA offers train-the-trainer programs that issue certificates in:

- ICD-10-CM/PCS
- ICD-10-CM
- Clinical documentation integrity
- Revenue cycle

AHIMA also offers the Medical Coding and Reimbursement micro-credential, which entails 13 online courses.

South-East Asia

Indonesia

HIM education in Indonesia consists of two levels: a 3-year-diploma (D3) and a 4-year diploma (D4) or applied bachelor's. Currently, 75 educational institutions provide 80 study programs in Indonesia.

Internal and external audits ensure program quality. External audits are conducted at educational institutions by BAN-PT (National Accreditation Board for Higher Education) and for study programs by LAM-PTKes (Independent Accreditation Institute for Higher Education). Three tiers of rating are valid for five years. Institutions receiving the lowest rating for two consecutive audits risk losing their operational license.

The quality of HIM education graduates is guaranteed by a national competency exam organized by the Ministry of

Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, Ministry of Health, Professional Organization of HIM Workers, and HIM Education Association (Indonesian of Higher Education for Health Information Management Association/APTIRMIKI). This exam takes two forms, i.e., a computer-based test (CBT) and an OSCE (Objective Structured Clinical Examination). Students cannot pass and get a diploma if they fail the national competency exam (exit exam). The certificate of competency (students passing the test) becomes one of the requirements to get a registration certificate for health workers and a work permit to be able to work professionally in the field of HIM. APTIRMIKI routinely organizes tryouts to help prepare students for competency exams.

Europe

The European Federation for Medical Informatics (EFMI) association represents member medical informatics societies from 32 countries across Europe. EFMI considers one of its obligations “to offer certification processes and certify the professionals of the current skills in the field of Biomedical and Health Informatics.”¹⁴ Toward that goal, the EFMI established the AC2, or Accreditation & Certification Committee. AC2 is charged with maintaining a database of approximately 1,000 active educational programs throughout Europe in Biomedical and Health Informatics, Medical Informatics, and Health Technology.

Germany

Der Fachverband für Dokumentation und Informationsmanagement in der Medizin (DVMD) offers credentialing for HIM professionals in Germany. DVMD offers a certificate that reflects the organization’s quality standards while emphasizing the importance of reliable training.

Certification is valid for three years, after which professionals must recertify via written assessment.

DVMD also offers a medical documentarian certificate, but it no longer offers a medical coding specialist track.

According to DVMD, about 10,000 people work in the HIM profession in Germany, and the demand for these professionals exceeds the supply. DVMD seeks to help supply certified individuals who can help navigate the increasingly complex healthcare system.

Spain

Spain does not have a nationally recognized HIM credential or certification. However, many employers offer an examination that professionals can take to demonstrate their medical documentation knowledge and proficiency. To work in a public hospital’s HIM department, professionals must pass such an examination, similar to becoming a civil servant.

United Kingdom

The Institute of Health Records and Information Management (IHRIM) is the UK’s professional organization for professionals working in health informatics, health records, clinical coding, or information governance. Since 1948, IHRIM has continuously provided members with up-to-date information on legislation, best practice, and current affairs relating to health informatics.

IHRIM is primarily an educational body that also offers examinations at various levels:

- Foundation Examination
- Certificate Examination
- Diploma Examination
- National Clinical Coding Qualification (NCCQ)

IHRIM is the only professional organization in the UK offering comprehensive qualifications for health records and health information professionals at all grades. An IHRIM qualification offers a competitive edge with employers, potential employers, colleagues, and peers. IHRIM qualifications are recognized in the UK as the benchmark of professional excellence.

Eastern Mediterranean

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

The Saudi Health Information Management Association (SHIMA) was established in 2015 as a not-for-profit entity under the patronage of the Central Board for Accreditation of Healthcare Institutions (CBAHI) to further the cause of HIM in Saudi Arabia and the region. CBAHI is the official agency authorized to grant accreditation certificates to all governmental and private healthcare facilities operating today in Saudi Arabia.

In Saudi Arabia, the majority of healthcare practitioners are accredited by an independent government agency, the Saudi Commission for Health Specialties (SCHS). Saudi teaching programs and certificates are recognized by all agencies in the Kingdom.

| Degree | Credential | Specialties |
|----------|-------------------|---|
| Diploma | Technician | Medical record Hospital administration Health informatics Clinical coding Health information management |
| Bachelor | Specialist | HIM HI Hospital administration |
| Master | Senior Specialist | HIM HI Hospital administration |
| PhD | Consultant | HIM HI Hospital administration |

HIMAA undertakes ongoing research and refinement of its Professional Competency Standards to ensure that they remain contemporary and relevant, and so that university HIM curricula represent the specialist professional skills and attributes required of new graduates. The standards have three levels: Profession Entry-level, applicable to university HIM program accreditation, and Intermediate- and Advanced-levels, which can apply to Health Information Managers' career-long, continuing professional development (CPD) needs.

HIMAA-accredited, profession-entry, Health Information Manager-qualifying programs are at:

- Bachelor's degree level (Pass and Honors degrees)
- Master's degree level (graduate-entry)

Clinical Coding courses are not subject to external (e.g. HIMAA) accreditation. As a registered training organization under national legislation, HIMAA offers the following courses whose curricula are prescribed by the Australian Government's Australian Skills Quality Authority:

- Certificate IV in Clinical Classification
- Diploma of Clinical Coding

Professional credentials

HIMAA's Professional Credentialing Scheme (PCS) is designed to encourage and enable member take-up of a wide range of CPD options. The PCS post-nominals are linked to HIMAA membership categories:

- CHIM (Certified Health Information Manager)
- CHIP (Certified Health Information Practitioner) for non-Health Information Managers, including Clinical Coders and other members of the health information workforce.

Western Pacific

Australia

Academic credentials

The Health Information Management Association of Australia (HIMAA) is the official, external accrediting body for university HIM courses (i.e. programs) in Australia. HIMAA also undertakes accreditation of HIM programs internationally, upon request from individual countries and universities.

Japan

The Japan Hospital Association (JHA) has provided HIM education in Japan since 1972. JHA permits accredited universities and vocational schools to use JHA's curriculum and teaching materials to provide HIM education and allow their students to sit for the certification examination. JHA accredits these institutions through onsite inspections. Currently, 20 universities and 47 vocational schools are accredited by JHA.

JHA began certifying health information managers in 1974 through an annual certification examination. In recent years, approximately 1,000 to 1,500 people are certified each year as health information managers.

As of May 2022, the total number of certified health information managers is 42,924.

Lifelong education for health information managers is provided by Japan Society of Health Information Management (JHIM), which has been certifying health information administrators (HIAs) since 2005.

Health information managers can, five years after obtaining their certification, earn points for professional activities. Those with sufficient points can participate in a workshop for health information administration (HIA) certification, write an essay, and sit for an interview in June every year. The award of the HIA certification to successful candidates takes place at the general meeting of JHIM every September. The HIA certification needs to be renewed every five years.

In 2021, JHIM launched a new e-learning program, "International HIM Education." The curriculum is adapted to meet the needs of Japanese HIM professionals and is based on [Global Health Workforce Council's](#) global curricula developed in 2016 by international experts who had been invited by AHIMA.

Japan Society of Health Information Management Association is also a registered body with the Council for Professions

Supplementary to Medicine (CPSM).

Republic of Korea

In the Republic of Korea, all medical-related work is strongly controlled in accordance with the Medical Act and related regulations. Korean national HIM licensees are verified for their professional ability in HIM and have a legally mandatory employment policy at general hospitals. Licensees also have a social responsibility to contribute to the development of the HIM sector and promote national health.

To take the national examination for qualification as a Health Information Manager, applicants first major in health and medical information-related studies at college and university, then complete and graduate from the subjects prescribed by the Ministry of Health and Welfare Ordinance.

101 universities and colleges operate HIM curricula, with programs ranging from two to four years. The national examination is conducted annually by the Minister of Health and Welfare, which then issues licenses to those who meet the acceptance criteria.

In 2015, a license reporting system was implemented to report the status and employment of HIMs to the Minister of Health and Welfare every three years. This system institutionalizes continuous professional education.

In 2020, the Korean Accreditation Board for Health and Medical Information Management Education (KAHIME) was designated as a recognized agency for evaluation and accreditation of HIM education throughout Korea.

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