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The Future-Ready HIM Professional: 5 Capabilities for Leading in the AI Era

AI has moved rapidly from experimentation into healthcare practice. As organizations and government agencies decide where and how to use it, **health information management (HIM) professionals play an essential role in ensuring AI is built on trustworthy information, governed responsibly, and implemented with people and patient outcomes at the center.**

During IFHIMA's early 2026 Focus on the Future of HIM series, speakers consistently highlighted both the uncertainty and the opportunity that artificial intelligence presents for the profession. While AI will undoubtedly reshape roles and workflows, many of the capabilities healthcare needs to navigate this transformation are already deeply rooted in HIM practice, including data quality, governance, privacy, standards, and information integrity.

Christopher Hutchins, CEO of Hutchins Data Strategy Consulting, noted that AI reflects the structure of the data it is trained on. Incomplete representation, inconsistent documentation, and other weaknesses can surface in AI outputs — making the information foundation critical to safe and equitable use.

The opportunity, then, is not for HIM professionals to abandon what they know and become AI technologists. Rather, **it is time for HIM professionals to apply their expertise in new ways: to understand the technology well enough to help shape its use, safeguard the information it relies on, establish appropriate guardrails, keep humans accountable for decisions, and help organizations rethink the people and processes surrounding the technology.**

IFHIMA's 2026 Focus on the Future of HIM series featured distinguished speakers from a variety of backgrounds and disciplines. In this paper, several are quoted:

Andrew Griffiths
CEO, Federation of Informatics Professionals (FEDIP)

Christopher Hutchins
CEO, Hutchins Data Strategy Consulting

Karima Lalani, PhD, MBA, FACHE
Associate Professor, McWilliams School of Bioinformatics, UT Health, Houston

Dr. Christy Lemak, FACHE
Executive VP of Research & Learning; The Scottsdale Institute

Shirlivia M. Parker, MHA, RHIA, CDIP, CRCR
Healthcare Executive and Strategic Advisor

Sallyanne Wissmann, CHIM, CHIA, AFCHSM
CEO, Health Information Management Association of Australia (HIMAA)

Dr. Young-Joo Won
Department Head, Yonsei University.

Successful, trustworthy AI depends on many competencies already at the heart of the HIM profession:

- Trustworthy data
- Documentation integrity
- Privacy and compliance
- Terminology and classification
- Governance
- Interoperability
- Human accountability

Dr. Christy Lemak, Executive VP of Research & Learning at The Scottsdale Institute, stressed that the HIM profession has been "underselling" itself for too long. She challenged HIM professionals to think of themselves as the architects of trustworthy, safe, responsible AI — professionals who understand the foundation, consider the end user, and help establish standards that extend beyond any single project.

For many HIM professionals, that foundation already exists. Becoming future-ready means building on it deliberately — strengthening the capabilities to navigate AI today while helping shape what the HIM profession becomes tomorrow.

This guide explores five places to start.

"HIM professionals, you are the architects of trustworthy, safe, responsible AI in healthcare."

Dr. Christy Lemak, FACHE
The Scottsdale Institute

Capability 1: Build practical AI literacy

Why it matters

HIM professionals must understand AI before they can effectively help shape or govern it. But AI literacy doesn't mean becoming an AI developer or understanding every new tool. HIM professionals need sufficient AI fluency to understand:

- What AI can and cannot do
- What data and information AI depends on
- Where AI outputs — the predictions, recommendations, summaries, classifications, generated comments, or other results — can introduce or amplify risk
- Where human review, validation, and oversight are required
- How bias can arise in AI and affect individuals, populations, and healthcare decisions
- The importance of transparency, clarity, and accountability in the use of AI
- How privacy, security, consent, and appropriate data use apply when AI is introduced
- How AI may affect information integrity, documentation, and the health record
- How workflows and roles may evolve with AI

In practice

Learn through use as well as discussion with your technology team. Select an approved AI tool and a low-risk task using fictional or appropriately authorized information. For example, compare an AI-generated summary of a fictional clinical note with the source: Did it omit an important fact, add an unsupported statement, or change the meaning? Note what requires verification and consider how those issues would be handled in a real workflow.

Identify AI already embedded in EHRs and other health information systems. Understand whether a feature uses conventional rule-based automation, predictive AI, generative AI, or a combination. The questions and controls should reflect what the technology actually does.

You do not need to build an AI model, but you should understand its intended task, the information used in its development, its limitations, and how its suitability for your setting has been evaluated.

Explore

Inputs: What information is supplied when the system is used? Is it appropriate for the task, and how does it differ from the information used to develop the model?

Models and systems: What powers the feature, who supplies it, and what was it developed to do? Were relevant populations and settings represented in development and testing? Where does information go during processing?

Outputs: What does the AI produce? Could it generate unsupported content, omit important information, or make an inaccurate prediction?

Validation: Who evaluates the system and reviews its output? Has it been tested for its intended use and relevant populations?

Decisions: How does the output influence a human decision or workflow? Where does human judgment remain essential?

Monitoring: How will the organization identify errors, bias, unexpected results, or declining performance over time?

The goal is to develop enough fluency — not technical mastery — to recognize where AI intersects with health information, ask informed questions of colleagues and technology partners, and translate the implications for people with different technical backgrounds.

As Sallyanne Wissmann, CHIM, CHIA, AFCHSM, CEO of the Health Information Management Association of Australia (HIMAA), explained, "Have a growth mindset of being curious, appreciating that there are things we don't know and that we're going to need to adapt our practice and knowledge around."

How to start

Explore: Select one AI feature and ask its owner or vendor what it does, what information it relies on, its known limitations, and how it has been evaluated.

Examine: Compare an approved demonstration or fictional example with its source information and identify what requires verification.

Learn: Record unanswered questions and use them to identify your next learning priorities. Revisit these as tools and workflows change.

Capability 2: Become a guardian of trustworthy information

Why it matters

AI is only as trustworthy as the information behind it, although data quality alone cannot guarantee reliable performance. As Christopher Hutchins explained, AI operates through information, not above it. AI reflects the structure of the data it's trained on and can therefore magnify the impact of poor-quality data, inconsistent terminology, ambiguous definitions, weak documentation, or bias.

Hutchins noted that AI requires several elements to safeguard interoperability:

- Stable definitions
- Controlled vocabularies
- Clear ownership
- Transparent documentation standards
- Defined oversight

These are familiar foundations for HIM professionals. University of Texas Houston's Karima Lalani, PhD, MBA, FACHE, noted that HIM professionals have long served as stewards of data. In the AI era, that role extends far beyond the medical record or health information department, with HIM professionals serving as "trustkeepers" and "guardians of interoperability."

"Technologies like AI will not reduce the importance of HIM professionals. Rather, they will make trusted and standardized healthcare data even more important."

Professor Young-Joo Won
Yonsei University, Republic of Korea

In practice

Examine how information moves through an AI-enabled workflow, from source documentation to its use in a record, code, report, or decision. Check whether the information is accurate, complete, current, and consistently defined, and whether its meaning is preserved as it moves between systems.

For example, when reviewing an AI clinical coding suggestion, check that it distinguishes a current confirmed diagnosis from a historical condition, a suspected condition, or one explicitly ruled out. Compare the suggestion with the source documentation and applicable classification rules; the presence of a term alone is not enough to establish that a code is appropriate.

Identify the source and owner of the information. Check for missing context, unsupported additions, and important omissions, and establish how errors will be corrected before they propagate into later records or reports. Preserve the ability to trace and audit the result and any corrections.

While the tools may be new, thoughtful stewardship of health information is not.

How to start

Trace: Follow one information flow from the original source, through its use by AI, to the resulting output.

Check: Identify a few recurring issues, such as missing context, inconsistent terminology, or outdated content, and explain their likely effect.

Act: Define with the responsible team how one priority issue will be corrected and checked again.

Capability 3: Establish human oversight and accountability

Why it matters

As governance frameworks struggle to keep pace with implementation, human oversight becomes even more important. Mature governance clearly defines human decision-making and accountability, allowing AI to become a support mechanism. Without it, AI can amplify risk.

"AI can assist the decision; it cannot absorb the responsibility."

Christopher Hutchins,
CEO; Hutchins Data Strategy Consulting

In practice

HIM professionals can help organizations establish clear accountability for how AI-generated information is reviewed, documented, and used. Define which tasks AI can support, where human review is required, and who has responsibility for approving, correcting, overriding, or escalating its output. These arrangements should reflect the level of risk and the specific use case.

For example, AI may identify a possible documentation gap and suggest a query. An appropriately qualified professional should determine whether the suggestion is supported by the record and whether a query is appropriate before it is issued. Meaningful human oversight requires more than simply approving an AI recommendation; reviewers need sufficient information, competence, time, and authority to question or reject it.

As AI-generated information moves into records, reports, or other workflows, HIM professionals can help organizations consider:

- Who reviews AI output before it is documented or used?
- Who is accountable for its use, and is that accountability clearly defined?
- How are model boundaries and limitations documented?
- How are algorithms and prompts validated and monitored over time?
- When should AI output be corrected, overridden, escalated, or trigger a pause for review?
- Can AI-generated information be traced as it moves into other records, systems, or processes?
- How are privacy, safety, equity, and compliance requirements protected?

Healthcare Strategic Advisor Shirlivia M. Parker recommended ongoing governance activities, such as algorithm review and calibration, documentation audits, and feedback loops that capture and act on user input.

How to start

Engage: Learn how AI governance decisions are currently made — and whether HIM is represented.

Clarify: Pick one use case and ask who reviews, overrides, corrects, and escalates the output. Determine who is accountable for its use and clear up unresolved responsibilities.

Test: Walk through a scenario where AI is wrong or uncertain. Does the reviewer have the information and authority to challenge it, escalate concerns, or pause its use?

Capability 4: Lead change across people, processes, and technology

Why it matters

Dr. Christy Lemak warned against repeating the mistakes of previous digital transformations. Organizations have layered new technology onto old workflows and underinvested in change management, resulting in insufficient user engagement and underwhelming results.

Lemak urged HIM professionals to reimagine the process itself, envision an interconnected ecosystem, and invest heavily in the people, time, resources, and skills required to manage change.

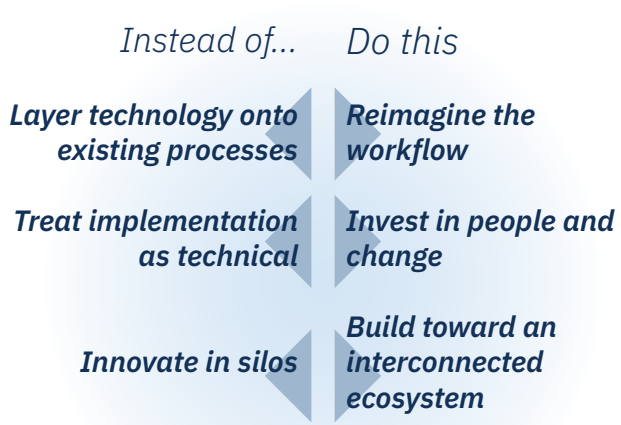
Dr. Karima Lalani offered a complementary framework: **people + process + technology**. AI adds another layer, but all three still matter. And, as Dr. Lalani stressed, "AI will not always be the answer." The people who understand the work, information flows, and decisions remain essential.

In practice

Start with a clearly defined workflow problem, not the AI tool. Examples might include delays, duplicate documentation, coding backlogs, or avoidable correction work. Map the current process with the people doing the work and identify what needs to change. Then consider whether the problem requires AI, another technology, or a simpler process improvement.

When testing an AI-enabled workflow, evaluate the entire process — not just what the technology does faster. For example, an AI-assisted coding pilot might produce suggestions quickly, but the true impact also depends on coding quality and the time people spend reviewing and correcting those suggestions. Compare the revised workflow with the current process to determine whether AI is actually improving the work.

Bring affected users into design and testing early. Address changing responsibilities, provide time and opportunities to learn, and create ways for staff to report problems and provide feedback. Use what you learn to refine the workflow before expanding implementation.



How to start

Define: Select one specific workflow problem and establish how the current process performs.

Design: Map the workflow with affected users and agree what should change, including responsibilities and training needs. Decide whether AI is the right solution.

Pilot and review: Test the revised process on a limited, approved basis and use results and staff feedback to refine it.

"We're not out of control. We're in charge of our own destiny. We have a voice in this."

Andrew Griffiths, CEO
Federation of Informatics Professionals (FEDIP)
United Kingdom

Capability 5: Expand your influence and help shape the future HIM role

Why it matters

The future of HIM will not be defined by technology alone. It depends on HIM professionals communicating their value, building relationships across disciplines, and helping shape how new technologies are used.

HIM expertise can only influence AI strategy when HIM professionals have a seat at the table. Dr. Lalani stressed the importance of communicating what HIM contributes across the healthcare value chain — pairing deep subject-matter expertise in areas such as analytics, workflows, interoperability, and governance with the ability to communicate and collaborate across clinical, technical, administrative, and leadership teams.

It also means looking beyond today's job descriptions. Dr. Lemak pointed to emerging opportunities for AI validation leaders, governance architects, data strategy partners, privacy innovators, workforce champions, and transformation drivers. Future roles will also emerge that do not yet exist.

In practice

Look for an existing initiative where HIM expertise can solve a specific information or workflow problem. That might mean defining documentation-quality criteria, reviewing how information moves between systems, evaluating an AI-assisted workflow, or identifying governance gaps. Work across functions to connect that contribution to an outcome the organization is trying to achieve.

Translate the HIM contribution into terms others can act on. Rather than simply identifying an information-quality concern, for example, explain the potential effect on workflow, risk, reporting, or organizational goals — and recommend a next step.

Use these experiences to identify capabilities you need to develop and opportunities to take on a larger role. You do not need a leadership title to begin. Raising a specific issue, proposing a way to investigate it, and contributing your expertise to a cross-functional initiative can expand both your skills and HIM's influence.

As Dr. Lalani described it, future HIM professionals may increasingly serve as "conductors of orchestration," bringing together human expertise and AI tools while ensuring that trustworthy information and patient outcomes remain at the center.

How to start

Identify: Find one current initiative where HIM expertise could address an information or workflow issue.

Translate: Explain the HIM contribution in terms of the problem it solves, the expected benefit, and how success could be measured.

Engage: Take that contribution to the appropriate colleague or project lead and agree on a specific next step.

The future of HIM starts now

AI will change healthcare workflows, responsibilities, and professional roles. But it does not change the fundamental need for trusted health information and accountable human decision-making. If anything, it makes that need more urgent.

HIM professionals already bring many of the capabilities healthcare organizations need to use AI responsibly: expertise in information integrity, privacy, governance, interoperability, and the flow of information across complex healthcare systems. The opportunity now is to extend that expertise into new areas — from managing information to shaping how AI uses it, from supporting compliance to leading governance, and from responding to technological change to helping lead it.

As Dr. Lemak challenged HIM professionals, the healthcare AI revolution will either happen to the profession or because of it.

Becoming future-ready doesn't require mastering every capability at once. Start with one capability and one practical action relevant to your work. Identify who you need to involve, define what a useful result would look like, and use what you learn to determine your next step.

The future HIM role is still being written. HIM professionals have an opportunity to help write it.

About IFHIMA

The International Federation of Health Information Management Associations (IFHIMA) provides community, education, and advocacy to help health information and health information management (HI/HIM) professionals deliver quality health information in an era of digital health and artificial intelligence. An NGO affiliated with the World Health Organization for over 45 years, IFHIMA's members include HI/HIM professionals from 55+ countries.