

# Combining HIM Staff

A daunting task but worth the effort! *By Debi Nelson, RHIT*

**MANY HIM DEPARTMENTS** will find themselves in a situation where they will be welcoming new staff to help out. Creative solutions are cropping up to fill either short-term needs or for long-term projects. A shortage of credentialed professionals in certain areas of the country could also create a need for an influx of new staff from areas of the country with more. This time of growth and adjustment can be filled with anxiety for both the newcomers as well as the veterans at the facility. Both groups likely have the same goal in mind – to enjoy their job, their co-workers and contribute their best skills

- **Remember**, typically volume drives the amount of staff needed to complete the various tasks and so as volumes rise, the need for staffing will also rise.
- **Watch for staff members** who are tempted to look elsewhere out of fear of losing their job.
- **Be mindful** of feelings of jealousy or rivalry with the new staff coming in.
- **Read between the lines.** Sometimes seemingly little issues such as insisting on being in an office with a window has nothing to do with the window. This can be a good time see what is really behind the request. It may have to do

and could be something during work such as a potluck.

- Next, try an after work get together for all staff with food, BINGO or some other fun and simple game with prizes. Have one group be in charge of games and the other in charge of prizes (e.g. logo wear or donations from local businesses).
- After a few months, try an after work event where the groups working on games or prizes or food are a mix of veteran and new staff.

## OTHER DO'S AND DON'TS

- **DO** stay positive but it is OK for others to see that you are outside of your comfort zone also.
- **DO** keep a running list of questions that have been asked and seek to find the answers.
- **DO** watch out for rumors and half truths being discussed by staff.
- **DO** give examples of rumors and then tell them either the actual fact or add it to your list to find out from someone.
- **DO** realize some employees will 'warm up' to the idea of needing the added staff much slower than others and it doesn't mean they are necessarily negative or against the idea.
- **DON'T** try so hard to make the new staff feel welcomed that you 'slight' existing staff.

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to make the HIM department even better! Here are a few tips to help everyone come together as a cohesive group:

## NO PROMISES AND BOLO (BE ON THE LOOK OUT FOR...)

- **Everyone** in the process will be looking for concrete answers. The truth is there are very few concrete answers at this time. If you are a HIM leader, **do not promise** anything that is out of your control, which could be salaries, department location, benefits and even dates by when decisions and answers will be known.
- **Find leaders** above you and take your concerns to them and trust they will have your best interests in mind.
- **Be open and honest** with staff and keep them informed as quickly as possible when information is known that can be shared.

with testing to see how valuable you feel they are to the organization.

- **Recognize** this IS a scary and unsettling time for all. **Stay focused** on the main goal to make your HIM department strong and the best it can be!

## IDEAS TO ACQUAINT STAFF WITH EACH OTHER (VETERAN AND NEW)

- Have a small 'meet and greet' team with representatives from each group of employees (new staff and veterans). This meeting should take place in a neutral place like a restaurant so everyone is as comfortable as possible. The goal is to help everyone start talking about their expectations, as well as see that everyone is nervous and anxious too but is willing to work together.
- The next event should be for everyone in HIM

## UNEXPECTED GOOD THINGS

There truly is a silver lining in this daunting task. You will really learn what you are made of and see the remarkable perseverance and kind hearts of others around you. Rise to the challenge!

Debi Nelson has been in the HIM profession for over 30 years and was a HIM director for most of those years in Wisconsin and North Dakota. Successfully merging two HIM departments with long term success is one of her career highlights along with public speaking for AHIMA events.