 Karen Linder, RHIA, CHDA, CCS, CCS-P, Coding Director for Rochester Regional Health

Karen Linder has been in the field of Health Information Technology (H.I.M.) for 18 ½ years. She first worked at a local family owned drug store as a pharmacy tech which led her to take courses in college with the thought of pursuing a career in pharmaceuticals. During the summers while in college she picked fruit for local farmers and worked at the pharmacy. However, working 60 hours a week along with the demands of college made her rethink her choice of profession. She looked at the Monroe Community College (MCC) catalogue and found that the Health Information Management (HIM) program was right for her. Going part time took her 4 years to complete but she said it was all worth it. She was not giving up on her goals.

After graduating with her Associates degree from MCC Karen earned her RHIT, and then two years later her CCS-P. Later she went on to get her Bachelor's degree in Health Care Administration from Roberts Wesleyan College located near Rochester. In 2014, she earned her CCS credential, and then in 2017 she earned AHIMA's new Certified Health Data Analyst (CHDA) credential. Karen loves statistics and graphs, and is a data nerd. She wanted to prove this skill set so she studied for this exam shortly after it was announced by AHIMA. She purchased the study guide from AHIMA to prepare for this test, but she currently performs a lot of data-related functions in her current role (more on that later), so she did not have to prepare too much. She also took a year of statistics classes while working at Thompson which was beneficial not only for the CHDA exam but also her career. In 2018, AHIMA issued a proviso, allowing RHIT's with a bachelor's degree (in any field) to sit for the RHIA exam, so Karen did and passed. Currently, Karen is pondering the idea of continuing her education to get her Master's degree, but she is not sure what it would be in. She says, "I'm not sure what I want to be when I grow up".

Karen began her HIM career as an outpatient coder for University of Rochester (UR) Medicine/Thompson's Health in the HIM Department where she helped the HIM team win the HIM Team of the Year from Advance Magazine. In addition to coding, she also maintained the dictation equipment that was used throughout the hospital, worked on the charge master and did some revamping of the revenue cycle. She also audited physician's office accounts. Karen went to work for Unity hospital in 2007 in the compliance office as the lead auditor/educator, providing education for coders and physician offices on Medicare Part A and Part B. She loved what she did there and learned much about different aspects of the revenue cycle.

From there she transferred to the HIM department as the Coding Manager in 2012. In 2014, Unity Hospital merged with Rochester General Hospital to become what is now the Rochester Regional Health System (RRH) For the first couple of years after the merger, she was the manager for the HIM coding

department working alongside the Senior Director of HIM (Judy Kelly) overseeing the merge of the two hospitals' HIM departments, billing departments and other revenue cycle functions.

In 2018, Karen was promoted to Coding Director of HIM for all of RRH. In this role she oversees approximately 100 coders including inpatient, outpatient, professional billing and ambulatory surgery. She is also responsible for working with the vendor to update and maintain RRH coding software, and overseeing the HIM denials management staff. Karen loves what she is doing. She likes working with her team of supervisors, coders and administrators. "The team has done so much," she says as she looks back at all of their accomplishments. It is never static in HIM, for it is always changing.

She credits her accomplishments to her directors who saw what she was capable of doing and mentored her along the way. She is grateful for the tasks they gave her because it helped prepare her for where she is today. She is committed to do the same for others so they can fulfill their own potentials.

What inspires her to do her work every day, is teaching and watching people grow in their positions. When asked, what were some of her greatest challenges in her career? She said it was overcoming her fear of speaking in front of people, and teaching doctors. She said that by doing it enough, she was able to become comfortable doing it.

What has be most rewarding to her in HIM, is working alongside her peers via the local Rochester Regional Health Information Association (RHIMA). She spent six years on the local RRHIMA board making friends, and being recognized at the state level by receiving the NYHIMA Author Award for writing an article for AHIMA. For NYHIMA, she traveled to attend conferences and gone places she would otherwise have never gone.   She has learned how different processes are done across the country and at the national level. She also got to attend Advocacy Day on Capitol Hill in Washington D.C with NYHIMA.

She encourages those looking to go into the field to get involved with local organizations and at the state level with NYHIMA. It is an opportunity to gain experience and grow in the field. It can open doors in the future. Volunteer whenever possible because opportunities arise while gaining experiences. There are many avenues in our field. It is not just coding. It is great to have knowledge of technology in your background too.

On her off time from work she enjoys time spent with her niece and nephew, and having dinner with friends. Her family are farmers. She grew up on a farm raising cattle, cash crops, and vegetables. On her time off she helps on the farm. She also likes playing on the local women's softball team in the summer and fall when possible.