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# Job Security in the Field of Health Information

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Job Security in the Field of Health Information

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I would like to thank Dr. Sajeesh Kumar for his guidance and understanding during the completion of my thesis.

This project has been very time consuming and difficult. It presented a great challenge to complete, with all the major life changing events that I have experienced this year.

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Gail Parker, sisters, Erica and Alva Parker and nephews, Sa'Viyon and Sean Parker, who I love so much and appreciate their support throughout my educational career. I know they are all very proud of me.

Job Security in the Field of Health Information Formal Research Proposal

**Abstract**

The industry of Health Information Management (HIM) has remained a hidden career field for several years, affording employment for a plethora of non-traditional job opportunities. Established in 1928, the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) has brought some awareness to the field, and over the years has become more aggressive in popularize the field of health information management (AHIMA Workforce, 2005).

Over the past eighty-five years the field of HIM has progressed tremendously, branching out into different sectors such as compliance, information technology and insurance; establishing more jobs under the field's umbrella. Health information management has gained much of its notoriety due to the Health Information Technology for Economics and Clinical Health (HITECH) Act, which has contributed to the abundant growth in the job market, retaining present jobs and supplying new positions.

After personally having to make a career change and choosing the field of HIM, what better way to support an accusation then to conduct a non-experimental qualitative research study to prove longevity and job security in the HIM market. Reassuring HIM professionals and prospects that there is more job stability in this field amongst any other.

*Keywords:* Health Information Management (HIM), Job, and Retention

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**Job Security in the Field of Health Information**

**Chapter 1**

**Introduction**

According to the Bureau of Labor, the field of health information management (HIM) was forecasted to experience a twenty percent employment growth within the next ten years due to the Health Information Technology for Economics and Clinical Health Act (HITECH) and Affordable Care Act (Safian, 2012). The predictions were true leading to a substantial number of career changes, while safeguarding and securing jobs. Now, five years later HIM professionals account for occupying over than more 180,000 healthcare positions and counting, and the health information field is expected to continue to grow until 2022. While health informatics jobs are suggested to grow thirty-six percent within the next four years (Cahill, 2013). And ambulatory facilities, including physicians' offices are expected to require 34 percent more health information management (HIM) workers, home healthcare services are projected to need 33 percent more trained HIM workers (Safian, 2013).

Do to the growth of the healthcare industry, and health information being a niche market, in most recent years several HIM professionals have been occupying non-traditional roles such as: privacy officers, health informaticists, clinical documentation specialists (AHIMA Workforce, 2005). Through the diverse knowledge and experience a HIM professionals possess, they have the ability to adapt, which reinforces job preservation.

"The year 2025 will still require privacy and security experts, data analysts, health information managers, and information release experts. But 13 years from now,

HIM will likely perform those roles in vastly different ways and healthcare

areas than in 2012, experts say" (Dimick, 2012).

**Background**

In 2008 the United States begin to witness an economical downturn known as the

Great Recession. Personally being affected by the economic tragedy, and left jobless due

to the extinction of the company. After being forced to seek a new career path, due to the

lack of available chemist positions, I was introduced to the world of health information

technology. After researching the career's field, the results were low turnover rates,

competitive salaries, and job growth opportunities; along with many others the field of

health information was a safe haven for job security. Recollecting on the 2009 job search

and recalling several job position listings requiring a "RHIT" (Registered Health

Information Technician) or an "RHIA" (Registered Health Information Administrator)

credential, obtaining either credential was my new set goal. I returned to school in 2009

seeking a degree in health information management.

"On top of strong job prospects, the HIM field offers competitive salaries. More

than half of new health information management graduates with a bachelor's

degree start with salaries in the $30,000 to $50,000 range, AHIMA figures show.

Five years out, some can earn up to $75,000- Lorraine Fernandes" (Lee, 2013).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to prove that health information is strong and stable

industry, by asking questions about years of work experience, job turnover/retention,

HIM longevity and recommendation of HIM as a career field. Through the presentation

of factual evidence obtained through research, by hand selected participants that are

employed in the field of health information within the state of Tennessee. After aggregation of the data, the results were displayed through graphs and tables to further support the opinions of, "job security in the field of health information."

**Significance of Study**

This study is important to the profession, because there is a considerable amount of growth in the field, with several job vacancies. There are not enough experienced professional to satisfy the market's demand, making jobs easier to come by and proving more competitive salaries. It has been approximated that 6,000 HIM professionals will be needed each year to fill new positions and replace vacant positions; however, there are only 2,000 new graduates enter the HIM field each year (AHIMA Workforce, 2005).

The significance of this study is to bring awareness to the field of health information, and about employment certainty and security in HIM due to the surplus of available positions. Also enticing undecided college candidates with the endless variety of job opportunities. The objective is to provide enough information to prove and support that there is job security in the field of health information management.

**Theoretical Framework**

The source of opinions and life experience is what will influence this study. Specific target questions are posed to either validate or discredit the research study, in regards to whether there is "job security in the field of health information."

**Research Questions**

The study seeks to provide information about individuals' background in the HIM field base on the positions held, work experience, and the amount of time spent unemployed.

The four specific research questions are:

- How many years of work experience does the average work professional have in the field of health information/informatics?

- Can a trend be proven that lower unemployment rates and turnover times are associated with the health information/informatics jobs?

- Does the field of health information/informatics provide longevity and an abundance of job opportunities?

- Would professionals in the field recommend health information/informatics as a career to others?

Through survey questions that were administered, facts and opinions of the participants could be obtained, to answer the research questions.

**Definition of Terms**

- Health Information Management- refers to the profession responsible for protecting and maintaining the integrity and availability of clinical information for the purposes of continuity of care, reimbursement, and other purposes deemed necessary (Safian, 2013). *

- Health informatics- that included but not limited to software programs designed to process and store health information such as electronic health records, personal health records, and practice management software (Safian, 2013).**

- Job Security- refers to retention and safety offer to HIM professionals, and the lack of downtime in between jobs.*

*For the purpose of this study, some of the definitions and meaning have been slightly altered to better fit the context of the research study. Other definitions for the term could be found through different sources.

**For the purpose of this study, health informatics will be a profession listed under the umbrella of health information. Any job pertaining to health informatics, i.e. application manager, IT project manager is a health information position as well.

## Chapter 2-Review of Literature

The literature review was conducted by selecting various articles from electronic newspaper, physical and electronic journals: Perspectives in Health Information Management, Journal of AHIMA, Chicago Tribune News, and TMC News. Also search engines were used such as Google, YouTube and PubMed courtesy of the University of Tennessee Health and Science Library. The keywords use to conduct the research were job retention, health information management growth, job vacancies, HIM careers, and demand for HIM professionals.

*Embracing the Future: New times, New Opportunities for Health Information Managers*
AHIMA Workforce Study Project

This article was a complete overview of all the changes that were going to occur in the field of health information, giving both the positive and negative effects. The article was selected because it shares the rapid growth in health information, the shortage of HIM professionals; which has created a surplus of available job opportunities, resulting in job security.

*Health Informatics Career Skyrocket as the Affordable Care Act Kicks In.*
Cahill, R

Cahill discussed the Affordable Care Act and where HIT professionals continue to head as they approach deadlines, health informatics jobs are expected to grow by 36 percent over the next four years. Also the article expressed what other non-traditional job opportunities would be made available, as a result of the Affordable Care Act. Cahill's article helped to support the purpose of the research.

*Health Information Management 2025: Current "Health IT Revolution" Drastically Changes HIM in the Near Future*

Dimick, C. (2012).

Health Information Management 2025, share how traditional HIM would be revamped, changing the roles of traditional HIM positions. "Some job roles will wither while others will blossom" (Dimick, 2012). The changes of roles afforded professional not to only use their skill set, but acquire additional skills. Giving HIM professional the ability to be place in other positions. Parts of the article reinforced the theory behind the study.

*Data Driven: Health Information Management Careers.*

Lee, J.

The short summary had a snippet, which was believe could be beneficial in establishing the relevance of the research performed. "On top of strong job prospects, the HIM field offers competitive salaries. More than half of new health information management graduates with a bachelor's degree start with salaries in the $30,000 to $50,000 range, AHIMA figures show. Five years out, some can earn up to $75,000" (Lee, 2013). This information would entice undecided college student and other looking for a career change. The article suggest not only are there job opportunities, but a lucrative salary included.

*Factors Influencing Students to Enroll in Health Information Management Programs*

Safian, S. (2012).

This article was a wealth of knowledge, providing the most recent labor statistics, contributing details on specific areas of growth where HIM works would be needed

strongly suggest receiving higher learning to prepare for up coming changes and have more flexibility in career choices. A question is posed on the survey inquiring about the credentials and certifications of the participants, this article supports this research studies in several areas.

## Chapter 3-Methodology

This quantitative study used a validated survey instrument utilized with permission by Dr. Kumar, to measure four specific responses to yield definitive final results. The researcher personally administered the paper survey and pen to approximately 80 percent of the study's eligible population.

**Research Design**

The survey consisted of nine questions, four being target questions and the remaining used for demographic and supportive data. The data was than organized into graphs and table to display findings.

- Gender, this question was solely asked to gather demographic data; this information will be displayed as a table.

- Age, this question was solely asked to gather demographic data; this information will be displayed as a table.

- How long have you been in the field of health information/ informatics; this is target question, the question was posed to obtain a definitive answer to whether there is job retention and security in the field of HIM information; this information will be displayed as a bar graph.

- What certification or credentials do you hold; this question was asked to support the argument of the statement; this information will be displayed as a bar graph.

- What is your current role; this question was asked to support the argument of the statement; this information will be displayed as a bar graph.

- What is the longest amount of time you have been without a job in Health Information/Informatics field; this is target question, the question was posed to

obtain a definitive answer to whether there is job security in the field of HIM information; this information will be displayed as a line graph.

- What job have you held in the field of Health Information/ Informatics; this question was asked to support the argument of the statement; this information will be displayed as a bar graph

- Do you believe the field of Health Information/ Informatics has longevity; this is target question, the question was posed to obtain a definitive answer to whether there is job security and retention in the field of HIM; this information will be displayed as a table.

- Would you recommend this field for others to pursue as a career; this is target question, the question was posed to obtain a definitive answer and retrieve opinions of participants to support the overall argument as a whole; this information will be displayed as a table.

**Data collection instrument**

The data collection instrument was developed in Microsoft Word. A survey and pen was administered by hand and assistance proved with answering any questions during the assessment. This data collection method was user friendly and provided anonymity.

**Sampling Populations Design**

The survey population consists of current health information management professionals, previous or past colleagues, and/or classmates working in the field. The majority of surveys were distributed at Optum Insight, Cigna-HealthSpring or Amerigroup, and the remaining administered to professional with in the state of

Tennessee between March to May 2014. There were hardly any refusals, more so the lack of downtime to distribute the remaining ten surveys.

**Data Collection Procedures**

All surveys were hand delivered, and the researcher present while the participant completed survey. Researcher remained present to answer and/or clarify any questions pertaining to the misinterpretation of the survey questions. Immediately after completion of the survey, data was entered onto an Excel spreadsheet as back up to store data, in the event that there may had been any damage to the original copy.

**Response Rate**

From March to May 2014 term of the study, there was an expectation to obtain response from a total of 50 individuals. Of these, 40 HIM professionals participated in the survey for an 80.00 percent response rate. Figure 2, represents the respondents participation rate and is depicted in the format of a pie chart.

Figure 1:

**Respondents Participation Rate**
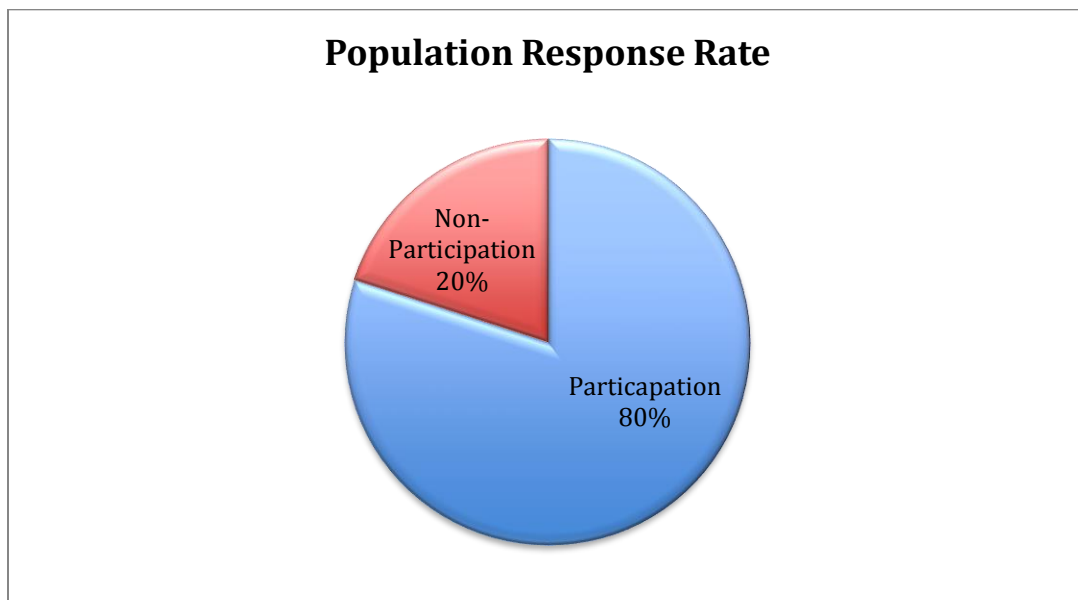
## Chapter 4- Results

After compiling and aggregating the data from the surveys, the findings were as followed.

**Gender**- seventy-eight percent of the respondents were female, the remaining twenty-two percent male. Refer to Table 1 for more details. From the information it can be gathered there was a higher female participation rate, it can be assessed that women may occupy a higher number of positions in the health information field.

Table 1:

**Respondents Gender**

| Gender Respondents | No. of Respondents | Percent of Total Respondent |
|---|---|---|
| Male | 9 | 18% |
| Female | 31 | 62% |
| **Total** | **40** | **80%** |

Age- the majority of HIM jobholders are between the ages of 40-50. Ages 25-30 are the second largest group. Refer to Table 2 for more details. Also, due to a large number of workers being over forty, it can be expected that some of the older professional will retire to avoid meaningful use challenges, privacy/ security rules, ICD-10 and other technological implementation, resulting in more job vacancies.

Table 2:

**Respondents Age**

| Age Group | No. of Respondent | Percentage of Total Respondents |
|---|---|---|
| 18-25 | 2 | 5% |
| 25-30 | 9 | 23% |
| 30-40 | 8 | 20% |
| 40-50 | 12 | 30% |
| 50-65 | 8 | 20% |
| 65+ | 1 | 2% |
| Total | 40 | 100% |

**How long have you been in the field of health information/ informatics-**

Determining years of experience, 17.5% had >1, 20% had 1-3, 27.50% had 4-10, 10% had 11-15, 15% had 15-20, and 10% had 21+. 25 out of 40 participants (63%) have no less than 4 years of experience in the field. Refer to Figure 3 for more details. This evidence supports the AHIMA Workforce study (2005) and Shelly Safian (2012) literature in regards to the large amounts of job vacancies, due to inexperienced candidates. "Nearly 75 percent of the AHIMA workforce survey respondents that manage or employ HIM professionals indicated there are not enough qualified applicants to fill open HIM positions in their organizations"(AHIMA Workforce, 2005).

Figure 2:

**Respondents H.I.M Experience in Years**
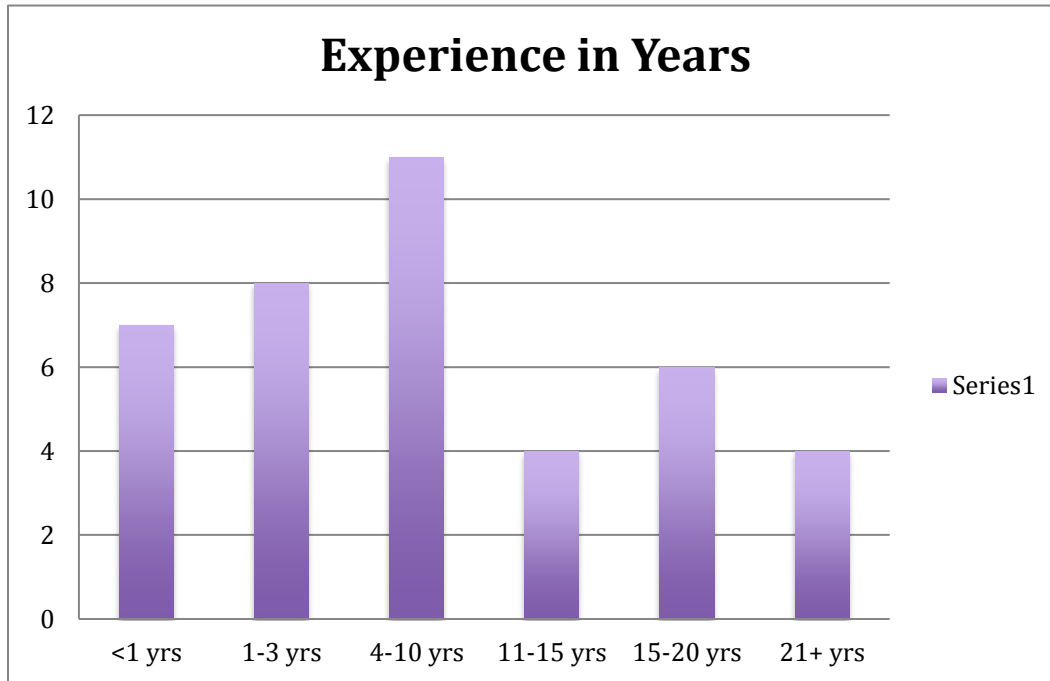
**What certification or credentials do you hold-** To truly advance in this field it is warranted to obtain a certification or credential pertaining to the field. The majority of respondents (92.5%) held at least one certification/credential if not more, only three of the participants had no credentials, one participant is currently pursuing her certification while already working the field. Refer to Figure 4 for more details.

Figure 3:

**Respondents Credentials and Certifications**
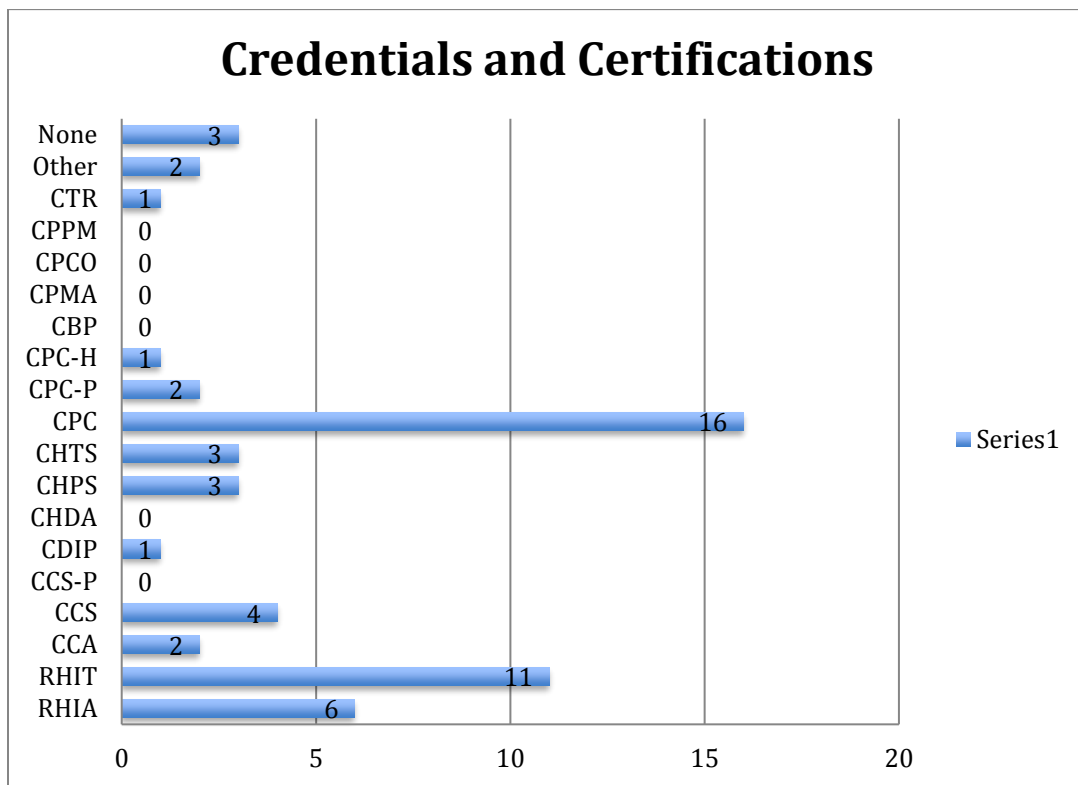
**What is your current role-** While most HIM professional continues to work in traditional roles, the results show that 25% of workers have chosen non-traditional roles. Refer to Figure 5 for more details. The previous two questions are to show the different accomplishments one can achieve, and the different positions that HIM professionals currently hold.

Figure 4:

**Respondents Current Position**
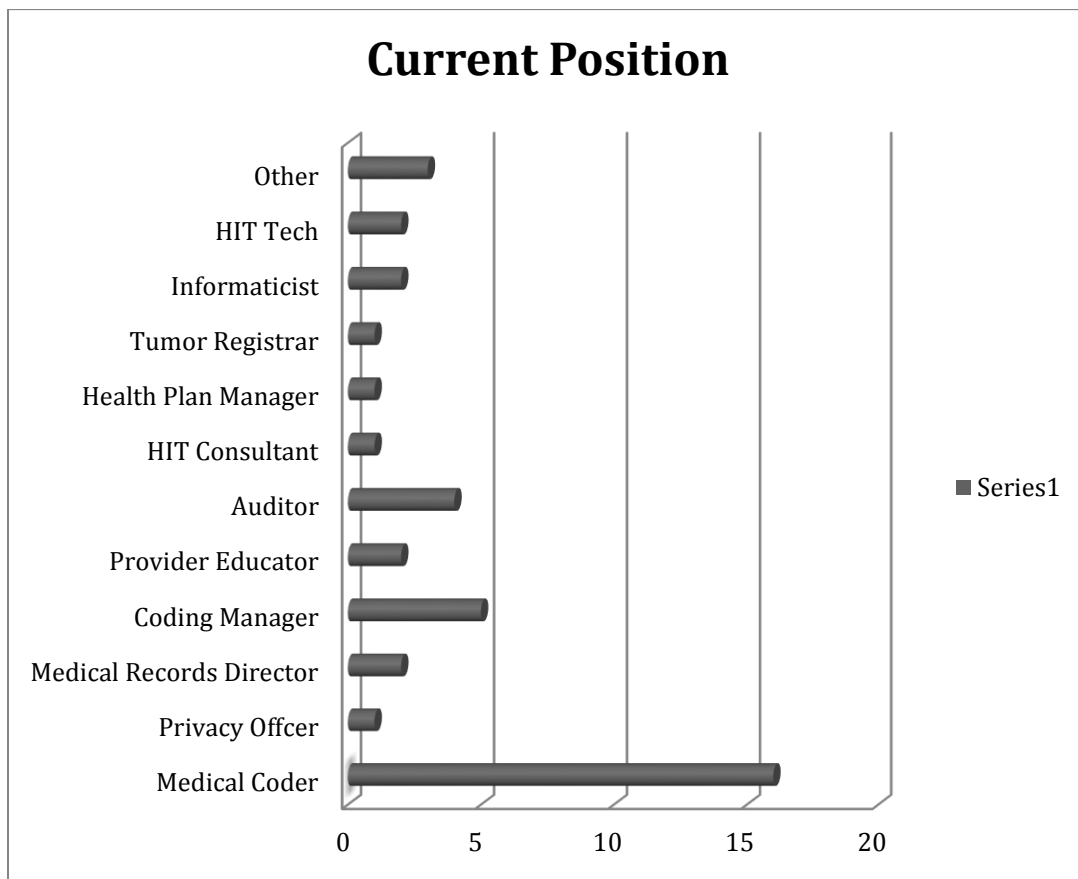
**What is the longest amount of time you have been without a job in Health Information/Informatics field-** Per the graph, "Unemployed Time Between Jobs", results show that there is a short rebound period. The line graph depicts acceleration as the time becomes shorter _in between_ finding a job. The majority of the respondents, approximately 45%, stated they have "never" been in between jobs. Meaning they have already been offered another position before terminating with their current employer. After those who responded to "never" being between jobs, the second largest group being 25% stated that they have been between jobs for less than three months, which is comparable to the 2011 Unemployment Bureau of Labor Statistics. This translates to job seekers in this field have an easier time finding jobs. Contrary to the spike at the >2year mark, what was determined from the data, were these participants had not yet entered the HIM job market or due to a long absence in the field, skills and continuing education were not current. The spike was not necessary due to the lack or inability to establish employment. Refer to Figure 6 for more details.

Figure 5:

**Respondents Unemployed Time Between Jobs**
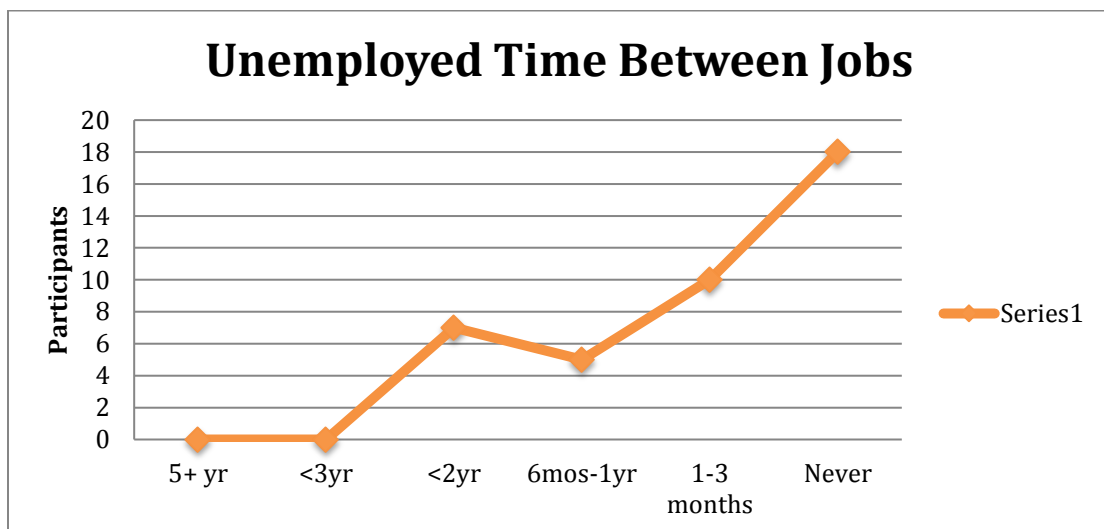
**What job have you held in the field of Health Information/ Informatics-** Of the twenty-one jobs listed on the survey; at some time HIM professionals had held a place in twenty of the positions. This graph better depicts the HIM professionals working in non-traditional settings, approximately 48%. Once again this is just an opportunity to share the various roles and career choices that can be pursued by a HIM professional, once proving stability, job security, and seeing the potential to mature in the market as it continues to evolve**.** Refer to Figure 8 for more details.

Figure 6:

**Respondents Previous Positions Held**
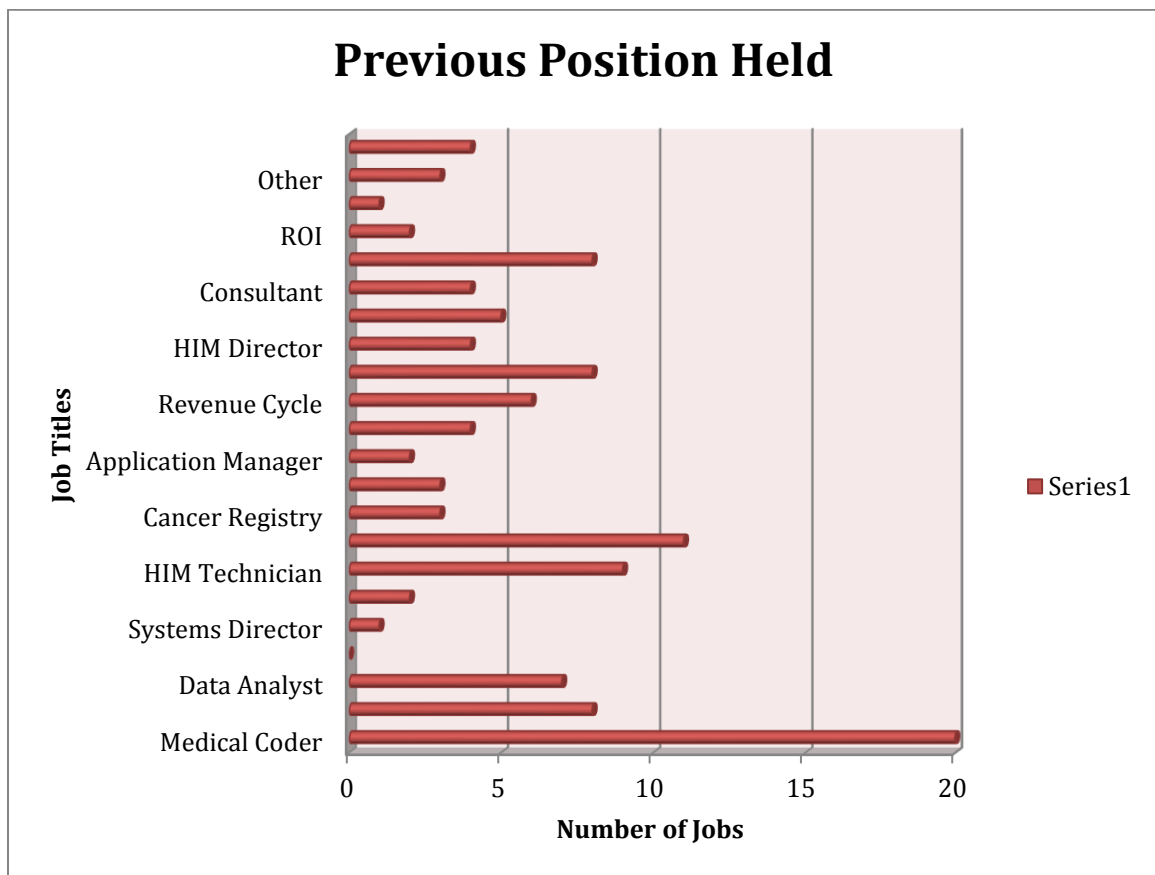
**Do you believe the field of Health Information/ Informatics has longevity-**

97.50% responded, "Yes", while 2.5% stated, "No". Refer to Table 3 for more details.

Table 3:

**Longevity in the Field of H.I.M**

| Longevity in H.I.M | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Response** | **No. of Respondents** | **Percentage of Response** |
| **Yes** | 39 | 97.50% |
| **No** | 1 | 2.50% |
| **Total** | 40 | 100.00% |

**Would you recommend this field for others to pursue as a career-** 92.50 %

responded, "Yes", while 7.5% stated, "No". Refer to Table 4 for more details.

Table 4:

**Recommending H.I.M**

| Recommending H.I.M | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Response** | **No. of Respondents** | **Percentage of Respondents** |
| **Yes** | 37 | 92.50% |
| **No** | 3 | 7.50% |
| **Total** | **40** | **100.00%** |

## Chapter 5- Analysis and Discussion

**Analysis and Discussion**

After obtaining the results, the four research questions can be answered validating or discrediting the argument of job security in the field of health information.

- How many years of work experience does the average work professional have in the field of health information/informatics?

The average health information/informatics professional has no less than 4 to 10 years of work experience in the field; this was established after research was conducted yielding a 63% response or 25 out of 40 participation.

- Can a trend be proven that lower unemployment rates and turnover times are associated with the health information/informatics jobs?

The line graph depicts acceleration as the time becomes shorter _in between_ finding a job. The majority of the respondents, approximately 45%, stated they have "never" been in between jobs, this maybe due to the job surplus in the market as mention previously. It is safe to assume a correlation between lower employment/turnover rates and HIM jobs, which further supports the theory.

- Does the field of health information/informatics provide longevity and an abundance of job opportunities?

Research shows that 97.50% respondents stated, "Yes", while the remaining 2.5% stated, "No". Also Figure 6, _Respondents Previous Position Held_, supports the inquiry of the abundance of job opportunities, with twenty-one jobs listed on the survey; at some point in time HIM professionals had filled twenty of twenty-one positions featured.

- Would professional recommend the field of health information/informatics to others?

   Research shows that 92.50 % respondents stated, "Yes", while the remaining 7.5% stated, "No". The majority of professionals would share or encourage others to establish a career in this industry.

**Limitations and Discussion**

   There were some minor limitations; the study may have been bias due to geographically location, participants were residents of Tennessee, not countrywide. The majority of participants were current or previous colleagues and employers; and also the participants were hand picked and not selected at random. The majority of the participants were medical coders, or worked within the coding operations and performance department. These factors may have determined the results yield.

## Chapter 6- Conclusion and Recommendations

**Conclusion**

The results collected from the survey provide evidence, and helps support the statement that there is job security in the field of health information management, along with the supporting articles. Majority of HIM professionals have been in the field for less than ten years. There are still a plethora of other job opportunities available, and HIM professionals are in demand, this creating job security.

Due to the surplus of jobs in this domain, obtaining a job is made easier in the event termination with a current position occurs, providing a sense of stability in the marketplace. As mentioned previous in the study the majority of HIM workers have never been in between jobs. Finally, 97.5% of participants believe that there is longevity health information and 92.5% would recommend that field to other as career choice. The research performed and information gathered successful proves the theory that there is job security in the field of health information/informatics.

**Recommendations**

It is strongly recommended that the study be research in the future to determine whether the employment in the HIM field will stand the test of time. Also, as mentioned previously that the data collected may have been bias do to work environment, location and the hand picked selection of participants. Performing the research study again by conducting another survey from a different population, may yield similar or different results.

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Appendix

Figure 7: **Survey Questionnaire: H.I.M Survey**

# Health Information Technology
# Career Survey

## 1. Gender:

Male          Female

## 2. Age:

18-25     25-30

30-40     40-50

50-65     65+

## 3. How long have you been in the field of health information/ informatics?

< 1 yr.                    1-3 yrs.

4-10 yrs.                11-15 yrs.

15-20 yrs.               21+ yrs.

## 4. What certification or credentials do you hold?

RHIA     RHIT        CCA         CCS

CCS-P     CDIP        CHDA        CHPS

CHTS      CPC         CPC-P       CPC-H

CBP       CPMA        CPCO        CPPM

**5. What is your current role?** _____

**6. What is the longest amount of time you have been without a job in Health Information/Informatics field?**

Never          1-3 mos.

6 mos. -<1yr          1- <2 yrs.

2-3yrs.          5+ yrs

**7. What job have you held in the field of Health Information/ Informatics?**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Medical Coder | HIM Technician | Revenue Cycle |
| Credentialing | Instructor | Coding Auditor |
| Data Analyst | Cancer Registry | HIM Director |
| CDI Specialist | Privacy/ Compliance | Quality |
| Systems Director | Application Manager | Consultant |
| IT Project Manager | Claims Analyst | Abstractor |
| ROI | Liaison | Alternate job_____ |

**8. Do you believe the field of Health Information/ Informatics has longevity?**

Yes          No

**9. Would you recommend this field for others to pursue as a career?**

Yes          No