

Special Audio Report Transcript

Headline: Health IT Stakeholders React to Clinical Informatics Becoming Certified Subspecialty

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I'm Mina Kim with reaction to clinical informatics becoming a board-certified medical subspecialty. This is a special report for *iHealthBeat*, a daily news service of the California HealthCare Foundation.

In September, the American Board of Medical Specialties formally recognized clinical informatics as a medical subspecialty. Physicians who are board-certified in any of the 24 primary medical specialties can now earn secondary certification as informaticians.

The American Medical Informatics Association says the role of clinical informaticians will be to combine their knowledge of informatics tools and patient care to improve clinical processes and clinical information systems.

Edward Shortliffe is president and CEO of the American Medical Informatics Association, or AMIA, which played a prominent role in the multi-year effort to recognize clinical informatics. Shortliffe says highly motivated physicians have pursued informatics as a professional interest for years.

(Shortliffe): "And this new decision by the ABMS now validates what they've been doing and what people like them will want to do in the future and says this is an important part of the future of medicine. It's a logical thing for some physicians to choose to specialize in this area."

The American Board of Preventive Medicine and the American Board of Pathology are co-sponsoring the subspecialty with the ABMS. The American Board of Preventive Medicine is expected to begin offering board examinations by fall of 2012. Shortliffe says AMIA is aggressively developing materials for exam preparatory courses that it hopes to roll out in the next six months.

(Shortliffe): "The goal of the fall of 2012 is a bit ambitious. The American Board is still saying that's when they would like to be ready, but I think we all recognize that this could slip into 2013. But we're working on our prep course options with the fall of 2012 in mind."

Shortliffe estimates there are up to 3,000 physicians working in positions that are suitable for what he calls the "grandfathering phase" of board eligibility. For the first five years, practicing clinical informaticians will be able to apply for board certification based on their work in the field. After that five-year period, physicians will need to complete a fellowship that is accredited by ACGME, the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education.

(Hersh): "We hope the ACGME will have an open view in terms of the types of training that will be allowed for people to pursue the subspecialty."

William Hersh is chair of the Department of Medical Informatics and Clinical Epidemiology at Oregon Health & Science University's School of Medicine, which offers certificates and a master's degree in clinical informatics. Hersh says that it will not be difficult for his programs to adapt to subspecialty education requirements but that he hopes online courses will qualify as fellowship training. He says many students in his graduate program are distance learners because they are mid-career, settled in a clinical position, or otherwise geographically tied to an area.

(Hersh): "There's no reason why the educational component can't be online. Every other field, including informatics, has been quite successful at really creating hybrids of online and in-person learning and hopefully these sorts of experiences will be available for those who train for this informatics subspecialty."

Hersh says he also wonders how the marketplace will value the subspecialty.

(Hersh): "Will hospitals decide that they're only going to hire board certified clinical informaticians? I don't think opportunities are going to dry up right away, but in the long run this will be a form of professional recognition."

Physicians who are board certified in informatics will likely have a leg up in the hiring process, says Joyce Sensmeier, vice president of informatics at the Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society, or HIMSS.

Sensmeier became board certified in nursing informatics 15 years ago and says some nurses with board certification in informatics have seen higher salaries as well.

(Sensmeier): "HIMSS does a nursing informatics workforce survey every three years, and in the most recent one, the non-nursing informatics certified nurses' salaries were about fifteen thousand dollars a year less than those [who] were certified."

Sensmeier says that's certainly a driver for nurses seeking the specialty, but the increased credibility it provides also is a motivator.

This has been a special report for *iHealthBeat*, a daily news service of the California HealthCare Foundation. If you have feedback or other issues you'd like to have addressed, please email us at ihb@chcf.org. I'm Mina Kim, thanks for listening.