

Case Study II. External Relationships

The owner of a consulting firm is awarded a contract to act as interim HIM director for an organization. Generally, the organization has had very little turnover within the position until the former director retired. However, the department has always outsourced its (Release of Information) ROI services. The interim director's company is technically a competitor of the company, which provides the ROI. The interim director's consulting firm submitted bids to the previous director for the ROI contract, but to no avail due to their pricing structure. Now, the interim director has access to the contract language for the existing ROI contract. Suddenly, the managing director of the ROI receives a 30-day notification that their services will no longer be used at the facility. Is there an ethical violation, dilemma, or concern?

This scenario contains an ethical concern. The interim director has "insider" information regarding contract terms. It is unclear to what company the new contract for ROI has been awarded. If an assumption is made that it is the company the interim director owns, then this would be unethical and a clear conflict of interest.

1. *What was the AHIMA member's actions that resulted in an ethics violation being brought forward?*

It appears that the act would be a financial gain for the consulting firm, resulting in a personal gain for the owner (interim director).

2. *What AHIMA Ethical Code has been violated?*

The principles and guidelines this member possibly violated include:

Principle 2. Put service and health and welfare before self-interest and conduct themselves in the practice of the profession so as to bring honor to themselves, their peers, and the health information management profession.

Guideline 2.3. Anticipate, clarify, and avoid any conflict of interest, to all parties concerned, when dealing with consumers, consulting with competitors, in providing services requiring potentially conflicting roles (for example, finding out information about one facility that would help a competitor), or serving the Association in a volunteer capacity. The conflicting roles or responsibilities must be clarified and appropriate action taken to minimize any conflict of interest.

Guideline 4.1. Act in a professional and ethical manner at all times.

3. *What is the potential harm to the AHIMA organization and the AHIMA member if the organization is made aware of the ethical violation?*

Multiple instances of harm are evident in this scenario. AHIMA and the AHIMA member's reputation would be harmed because the hospital hired the member who knowingly has a conflict of interest. It could be misconstrued that the firm purposely hired the director who engages in unethical behavior. The current ROI Company is financially harmed due to the loss of the contract. The hospital's reputation could be harmed since they hired an interim director who made questionable decisions. AHIMA is also harmed since the person acting unethically is considered to be an AHIMA member.

4. *What is the status of the AHIMA member's training, education, and awareness of the AHIMA Code of Ethics?*

It is assumed that the interim director is credentialed by AHIMA and should be aware of the Code of Ethics for AHIMA.

Resolution: At a minimum, education and training on the Code of Ethics should be undertaken with this member. Clarification is needed on which company received the ROI contract. If it is the consultant's company, that would be a direct conflict of interest and should be considered strongly when evaluating ethical conduct and any further action to be taken.