



Top 5 Health IT Skills

Health IT, or HIT, is one of the fastest growing sectors of the technology industry in terms of employment. This white paper provides a quick look at some of the most desirable – and competitive – roles within HIT for the coming year. Whether you're a hiring manager or an IT professional excited about opportunities in this space, you'll want to watch development in these key areas.

What's Driving HIT Staffing Demand?

Health IT is a broad term, encompassing the full spectrum of health information and technology within the healthcare industry. HIT address the need for data security and privacy protection as information is transferred between consumers, providers, insurers, government and third party providers.

According to [Wikipedia](#), Health IT “is increasingly viewed as the most promising tool for improving the overall quality, safety and efficiency of the health delivery system (Chaudhry et al., 2006).”

HIT is a high growth area due to of increasing demand for services from an aging population coupled with advances in patient care technology, data management capabilities and government legislation.

Provisions of The Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health (HITECH) act enacted as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 are designed to promote adoption and meaningful use of health information technology while strengthening HIPPA¹ rules.

Both the government and the healthcare industry have high hopes for the positive impact of HIT, which is expected to provide benefits including:

- Better and more uniform health care quality
- Reduced medical errors through improve training and communication
- Enhanced coordination of care between providers
- Lower overall health care costs and easier access to affordable care
- Greater administrative efficiencies, including a reduction in paperwork

¹ The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act or HIPAA was passed in 1996

Top Challenges Facing Healthcare CIOs

Brian Eastwood, senior editor of CIO.com, recently reported on the impact of HIT for CIOs. In his article [Top Challenges Facing Healthcare CIOs](#), Eastwood points out that “Few industries face as many IT challenges as healthcare, where government mandates, security requirements and a need to replace outdated technology make a CIO’s job difficult.”

Jamie Churchill adeptly provides a detailed view of the key challenges and business drivers facing today’s healthcare CIO on the [Perficient blog](#)². These challenges include:

Meaningful Use

A term defined by the HITEC Act, Meaningful Use requires healthcare providers to adopt and utilize Electronic Health Records (EHRs) in a meaningful way by 2014 to avoid reduced Medicare reimbursements. Movement toward Meaningful Use involves two stages of adoption:

Stage 1 includes creating a patient portal to facilitate speedy access to patient data.

Stage 2 focuses on interoperability between EHRs and other systems.

Business Intelligence systems support Meaningful Use with standardized data formats, secure information sharing and portable, comprehensive patient care records.



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- Brian Eastwood, senior editor of CIO.com

² Read the full post at: <http://blogs.perficient.com/healthcare/blog/2012/08/30/health-it-the-solution-to-healthcare-cio-challenges/#more-4485>

Health Information Exchange (HIE)

Sharing information across entities is essential for compliance with regulatory standards. [Accountable Care Organizations](#) (ACOs) use exchanged data to connect and coordinate care for patients and providers. An HIE provides access to this data for all parties that need it, and “empowers them to achieve high quality outcomes along with a more cost effective delivery model.”

Mobile and Telehealth

One of the most exciting HIT developments is mobile health and telehealth (remote delivery of healthcare services). However, while these solutions can “encourage patients to become engaged in their own care, but also present data security risks and implementation issues.”

Mobile technology and telehealth have many benefits, including:

- Immediate access to important medical history and patient information
- Increased coordination of care
- Access to care for underserved populations
- Reduced need for office visits
- Improved ability to manage chronic conditions

These cost savings and quality benefits come with a requirement for high levels of data security, both within the systems and during data transmission, especially via wireless.

Clinical Data Analytics

Data analytics can fuel important insights necessary to improve healthcare quality and reduce costs. As access to data on patient outcomes and clinical care patterns accrue, this “big data” will become invaluable for performance analysis.

Churchill explains, “Healthcare business intelligence can provide organizations the ability to use these large amounts of data to improve quality of care, increase financial efficiency and operational effectiveness, conduct innovative research as well as satisfying regulatory requirements.”

Impressive Growth Ahead

As CIOs work to address these challenges, demand for skilled employees, contractors and consultants will accelerate. The Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts that the healthcare sector will generate more new jobs than any other industry in the next several years.

Health IT is the next wave for technology and job growth. [Staffing Industry Analysts](#) estimates the Health Care IT Industry is an estimated \$24 billion dollars and growth rates are expected to be 24%.

[HIMMS](#) (the Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society) estimates that the US needs 108,000 Health IT professionals today and an additional 40,000+ professionals will be needed by 2015. Estimated growth rates are projected to be between 15-20%.

Quick facts about Health IT jobs in the U.S. (according to Simply Hired):

- 100,000 Health IT jobs
- 66% are permanent positions
- 50% require Bachelor's Degree
- 61% require 5 or less years of experience
- 28% require 10+ years of experience



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Top 5 Health IT Skills

Certain industry-specific skills will be a high priority for CIOs who are competing to recruit the best and brightest from a limited talent pool. Employees seeking new career challenges will find opportunity for career growth and innovative work, particularly in these critical positions:

Richard Hein of CIO.com provides a snapshot of the hottest HIT skills³ in the coming year in a slideshow on [ComputerWorld](#). Hein's top picks, with salary estimates, include:

1. EMR Build Specialists

Topping the list is Electronic Medical Records (EMR) Build Specialists. Hein quotes Keith Fulmer, executive vice president of Kforce Healthcare Solutions, who says, "Regardless of vendor [HIT] needs people to build and configure systems specific to the client environment." These positions require healthcare experience and knowledge of patient care, as well as accounting and CRM, "but there's more complexity because there is more involvement with patients," says Fulmer.

Average annual earnings? \$75,000.

2. Healthcare Analytics / Data Architecture

The data explosion in healthcare demands experts to organize and analyze all that information. HIT analytics and data architecture both require specific understanding of a provider organization and its patient workflows in order to capture the right data and pinpoint opportunities for improvement.

"Each area has unique challenges," says Fulmer. "Healthcare analytics are similar to BI in the sense that data is constructed and routines are generated to develop predictive vs. reactive patient care outcomes." Knowledge of healthcare operations, finance and patient care is essential.

Annual salaries average \$102,000-\$110,000.

³ For the full list, see <http://www.computerworld.com/slideshow/detail/74033/7-Hottest-IT-Healthcare-Skills>

3. Project/Program Management

Hein references ComputerWorld's 2013 Forecast survey of 334 IT executives, which shows that 40 percent plan to hire project and program managers. ICD-10 compliance requires effective project management, making this a critical role for healthcare IT providers. Fulmer says, "The most valuable project managers will have experience in the ongoing issues affecting HIT."

Program managers oversee a portfolio of projects, working side-by-side with project managers. "The program manager may be responsible for the overall change management, risk management and executive reporting," says Fulmer. Hein points out that ICD-10 requirements for "a code set to document conditions and procedures that exists in every level of healthcare IT, means that even small hospitals have up to 40 projects required to become compliant."

ICD-10 is just one of many HIT challenges, and there is likely to be growing demand for these roles in 2013.

Average salaries for Project managers are \$105,000 annually, while Program Managers make about \$97,000 a year.

4. Application Development

For IT professionals looking to transition from other industries, application development provides a solid opportunity. The Bureau of Labor Statistics predicted a 32 percent increase in demand this skill for 2012, with additional growth expecting in 2013. "Healthcare IT needs worker skilled at traditional programming languages like Java and .NET [as well as] mainframe experience," says Fulmer.

HIT application developers earn an average of \$95,000/year.

5. Quality Assurance

Ensuring the performance of HIT systems is critical, making the need for qualified Quality Assurance (QA) people perennial. These IT experts address issues with usability as well as testing for compliance, bugs and other issues that can impact healthcare administrators, caregivers and patients.

"QA people are a big component as we look at unit and user-testing for EMR [Electronic Medical Records] and ICD-10, " says Fulmer.

Quality Assurance Specialists average, \$92,000 annually.

Meeting the Need

Looming regulatory deadlines will increase pressure to quickly hire for these key positions. This means CIOs will need to develop a strategy for recruiting from traditional sources as well as exploring options for new talent migrating from other industries.

Candidates will find opportunity in both start-ups and established organizations. A record of successful performance will assist IT professionals who wish to transition their skills into HIT. New training and certification programs will likely become popular to expand availability of qualified employees.

Working with a staffing agency that has deep ties to the HIT industry can also be a strategic recruiting advantage. By unlocking access to hidden talent and passive job seekers, IT leaders will be able to maintain their competitive edge while keep focus on operational issues

Resources

Health Affairs Blog - The Stage 2 Meaningful Use Of EHRs Final Rules: Still No Surprises But Important Steps Forward by Ashish Jha, August. 24, 2012.

<http://healthaffairs.org/blog/2012/08/24/the-stage-2-meaningful-use-of-ehrs-final-rules-still-no-surprises-but-important-steps-forward/>

Perficient Blog - Health Information Exchange: Where are we today? by Jatinder Koharki, September 26th, 2012.

<http://blogs.perficient.com/healthcare/blog/category/health-information-exchange/>

Perficient Blog - Health IT: The Solution to Healthcare CIO Challenges by Jamie Churchill, August 30th, 2012

<http://blogs.perficient.com/healthcare/blog/2012/08/30/health-it-the-solution-to-healthcare-cio-challenges/#more-4485>

CIO.com - Top Challenges Facing Healthcare CIOs by Brian Eastwood, August 21, 2012

http://www.cio.com/slideshow/detail/61650/Top-Challenges-Facing-Healthcare-CIOs?source=CIONLE_nlt_enterprise_2012-08-22#slide1

ComputerWorld.com - 7 Hottest IT Healthcare Skills by Richard Hein, October 18, 2012

<http://www.computerworld.com/slideshow/detail/74033/7-Hottest-IT-Healthcare-Skills>

About Agile

Agile is an innovative IT staffing and consulting firm that speeds time to talent by matching great people to great opportunities, enabling our clients to drive business results and create competitive advantage. Agile has grown over 400% in the past four years, and has been recognized by Inc. Magazine on the Inc. 5000 list three years running and was recently named the #3 Fastest Growing Staffing Firm in the nation by Staffing Industry Analyst

Founded by **Tricia Dempsey** in 2003. Agile is a values-driven organization committed to community involvement and charitable causes. Through **Agile on the Green**, the firm's annual golf tournament, Agile has raised more than \$200,000 for **Komen for the Cure – Greater Atlanta Affiliate**. Agile is a certified woman-owned business (WBENC).

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