

UW System's first healthcare IT degree meets needs in exploding field



Brenda Tyczkowski has watched the explosion of healthcare information technology during 20-plus years as a nurse, nursing director and now academic director of the UW System's first healthcare IT degree.

Pioneers like Brenda Tyczkowski quickly recognized benefits of electronic medical records (EMRs).

As a nurse in the late 1980s, she recalls, "With EMRs, I could see medical teams close the gap in a patient's care, have a better understanding of the family medical history, and provide higher quality and safer care."

As a director of nurses, she engaged the services of a computerized medical record start-up company for Good Shepherd Nursing Home in Seymour, which is in Outagamie County.

"I became involved at a time when EMRs were virtually unheard of and 'nursing informatics' did not yet exist," she says. "Making changes that really improved care within my own facility was very exciting, so I went on to work for the budding industry and helped provide access to patient information. From the smallest clinics with 10 beds to veterans' facilities with 600 beds, in rural to urban centers, everyone benefitted."

Brenda, who earned registered nurse and doctorate of nursing practice degrees, now serves as an academic director for the first healthcare IT degree in the University of Wisconsin System. It is based at UW-Green Bay.

She has watched the health records industry's explosive growth from small entrepreneurial ventures to EMRs becoming a federal mandate. The Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health Act (HITECH Act) signed into law in 2009 has brought dramatic change to the entire healthcare field.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts a 20% increase in employment of health information and medical records technicians by 2018 - far faster than the average growth for all other occupations in the United States. UW-Extension and four campuses — UW-Green Bay, UW-La Crosse, UW-Parkside and UW-Stevens Point — have stepped up to help meet the burgeoning demand with the new collaborative online [Bachelor of Science in Health Information Management and Technology](#) [1] program.

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The UW System Board of Regents approved the new program in spring 2012 and courses began in fall 2012. The 60-credit curriculum includes 20 classes covering topics such as:

- Health and medical terminology
- Medical ethics
- Information technology in healthcare
- Health benefit plans and providers
- Leadership and change management in healthcare

The need for healthcare informatics will only increase. Shifts in our aging population demographics will increase demand for healthcare overall. Adopting advanced healthcare informatics is essential to meet these expected demands, control cost and provide a higher level of care.

"This degree is unique in that it accommodates a wide range of career paths," Brenda says. "It can be a springboard to a career in the fast-growing field of healthcare, or the key to advancement across a broad range of careers. It's an even more exciting field today than it was 20 years ago, and the rewards of truly making a difference in patients' lives are richer than ever."

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