

Honoring Those Who Make a Difference

2021



TRIUMPH  
AWARDS

# 2021



AHIMA has a long and cherished tradition of honoring the excellence, dedication, and service of those professionals whose steadfast efforts have enriched the health information (HI) field. This time-honored celebration of outstanding accomplishments continues with the 2021 AHIMA Triumph Awards.

The AHIMA Triumph Awards are national awards designed to recognize those special individuals who have made a difference in the HI profession. The AHIMA Triumph Awards honor leaders in the HI field, reward contributions that build our knowledge base, recognize excellence in preparing future HI professionals and encourage fresh talent and new leadership.

**Congratulations to the 2021 AHIMA Triumph Awards recipients and nominees!**

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AHIMA gratefully acknowledges  
the generous support of:



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## 2021 AHIMA TRIUMPH AWARDS NOMINEES:

**Sylvia Alcalá**, RHIA, CDIP, CCS, CPC-I

**Beatrice Avila**, RHIA, CCS-P

**Julissa Avila**, RHIT, CE, HRF

**Karen Baytops**, RHIT, MSM

**Susan Clark**, BS, RHIT, CHTS-IM, CHTS-PW

**Susan Gatehouse**, RHIA, CPC, CCS, AHIMA  
Approved ICD-10-CM/PCS Trainer

**Brandi Hunsaker**, RHIT

**Lisa Hunter**, RHIT, CHPS

**Vatsala Muthukumaraswamy**, CCS, COC,  
AHIMA Approved ICD-10-CM/PCS Trainer

**Ohio Health Information Management  
Association (OHIMA)**

**Anny Pang Yuen**, RHIA, CCS, CCDS, CDIP

**Sandra Santos Nieves**

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## SPECIAL THANKS TO THE 2021 AHIMA TRIUMPH AWARDS COMMITTEE:

### CHAIR

**Laura T. Shue**, MPA, CHDA, CPHIMS

### MEMBERS

**Sarah Branish**, RHIA

**Donna Crew**, RHIA

**Mary Beth T. Haugen**, MS, RHIA

**Heather Hunn**, RHIA

**Kenneth T. Lugo Morales**, MS, RHIA

**Angela Rose**, MHA, RHIA, CHPS, FAHIMA

To find out more about  
the AHIMA Triumph Awards,  
visit our website at  
[ahima.org/who-we-are/grace-  
award/triumph-awards/](https://ahima.org/who-we-are/grace-award/triumph-awards/).

**Nominations are  
due June 1, 2022**



**TRIUMPH  
AWARDS**

*Distinguished Member*



**MELINDA A. WILKINS,  
PHD, RHIA, FAHIMA**

The **DISTINGUISHED MEMBER AWARD** is AHIMA's highest honor. This award celebrates an outstanding member who has a long, exceptional history of significant contributions to the HI field through dedicated volunteer service, innovative professional practice, education, research, presentation, or publishing.

AHIMA celebrates the recipient of this award every year to recognize one individual's commitment and accomplishments to the continued growth of the HIM profession. AHIMA is honored to present this year's Distinguished Member Triumph Award to **Melinda A. Wilkins, Ph.D, RHIA, FAHIMA**.

Dr. Wilkins is Program Director at Arkansas Tech University for the graduate program in Health Informatics and undergraduate program in Health Information Management (HIM). She has dedicated more than 30 years to educating future HIM professionals. A nationally recognized author and presenter of numerous educational workshops, books, and articles, Dr. Wilkins' contributions are used in HIM curriculums nationwide. Her present focus is researching change management in health IT implementations.

Throughout her remarkable career, Dr. Wilkin's influence has helped to evolve and advance the practice of HIM. Her commitment, leadership, and expertise in healthcare informatics and the impact of healthcare technology on HIM has been instrumental not only in our profession's positioning, but in the education of emerging professionals. Dr. Wilkins has been awarded the Distinguished Member and Living Legacy awards at the state level. She has attained Fellow status with the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) and is a prior recipient of the Triumph Award in Leadership.

A career volunteer at the national and state levels, Dr. Wilkins has committed her knowledge and expertise to secure and assure the future of HIM. At the national level, she has served as a Director on the AHIMA Board of Directors, Chair of the Board for the Commission on Accreditation for Health Informatics and Information Management Education (CAHIIM), and a Board Member for the AHIMA Foundation, to name a few. At the state level, she has consulted for Arkansas' health information exchange efforts and is past president of the Arkansas Health Information Management Association, also having served on numerous committees and chair appointments, as well. Dr. Wilkins holds a PhD in Organization and Management with a specialization in Information Technology from Capella University and a Master of Education in Agency Counseling. She earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Medical Record Administration from Southwestern Oklahoma State University.

Dr. Wilkins has demonstrated exceptional leadership and mentorship, is an esteemed educator, and HIM advocate whose contributions have and will continue to shape HIM practice into the future.



**TRIUMPH  
AWARDS**  
*Educator*

The **EDUCATOR AWARD**

honors those who demonstrate excellence in preparing the next generation of professionals for their health information management (HIM) careers.



**JUDY MONESTIME,**

**DBA, MBA, RHIA, CHDA, CPHI, CDIP, CPC-I, CPC**

AHIMA is proud to present the 2021 Educator Triumph Award to **Judy Monestime, DBA, MBA, RHIA, CHDA, CPHI, CDIP, CPC-I, CPC.** Dr. Monestime is an Instructor in the Department of Management Programs at Florida Atlantic University. Previously, Dr. Monestime was active at University of Maryland and Walden University with adjunct status.

Dr. Monestime actively contributes to advancing the professional knowledge base of health information, authoring 16 web-based publications, presenting at 17 conferences, and publishing five peer-reviewed journal articles including the *International Journal of Medical Informatics* and AHIMA's *Perspectives in Health Information Management*. Prior to her time with Florida Atlantic, she served as a Revenue Cycle Consultant for Accenture, Vice President for ICD-10 Consulting with the CODESMART group, and as a Principal and Senior Consultant for PLM Consultants, all while pursuing her graduate and doctoral degrees.

Dr. Monestime has served as a member of the AHIMA Foundation Research Network (ARFN), where she regularly presented studies; her findings led to her becoming the AFRN Operation Excellence Workgroup Lead. In addition to her service to AFRN, she served as a member of AHIMA Clinical Terminology & Classification Practice Council, HIMSS ICD-10 Task Force, and the Florida Health Information Management Association (FHIMA) Advocacy & Government Relations Committee. She is an external review consultant and advisory board member to multiple CAHIIM accredited programs in the USA, and a manuscript reviewer for both *Perspectives in Health Information Management* and *Applied Clinical Informatics* journals. Dr. Monestime was also recently recognized by FHIMA with the 2021 Educator Service Award and continues to share her passion for students and emerging professionals in health information.



**VARADRAJ PRABHU GURUPUR,  
PH.D, RHIA**

The **INNOVATION AWARD** honors people or groups who have promoted important advances in areas related to HIM practice, quality data, patient safety, systems development, or any domain where visionary thinking has made a difference.

AHIMA is pleased to present the 2021 Innovation Triumph Award to **Varadraj “Raj” Prabhu Gurupur, Ph.D, RHIA**. He is an associate professor in the Department of Health Information Management at the University of Central Florida in Orlando. He was also on the AHIMA Triumph Awards Committee in 2018 and 2019.

Dr. Gurupur has been an active researcher in health information management for more than 10 years. He has published more than 85 journal articles, papers, abstracts, reviews, and book chapters. He has been recognized for his outstanding contributions with awards at the state, international, and institutional levels.

Dr. Gurupur is an expert in designing algorithms and methodologies that aid in the design and implementation of decision support systems with a focus on healthcare. He has contributed to the HIM field in the category of innovation with his patent and copyrights. Dr. Gurupur’s invention consists of the data completeness algorithm (US Patent 10790049-B2) which can have a critical impact on the use of electronic health records resulting in patient safety, timely reimbursement for healthcare providers, and reduction in man hours for payers. Earning a grant from National Science Foundation (NSF) has assisted Dr. Gurupur in taking his invention to the next level. While working on the NSF funding work it was realized that his invention is extremely critical for rural healthcare providers.

Overall, Dr. Gurupur’s work created a new horizon in the field of HIM, resulting in more inventions toward managing electronic health records with respect to analyzing data incompleteness of patient records.



**TRIUMPH  
AWARDS**  
*Leadership*

The **LEADERSHIP AWARD** honors an individual or group who has provided outstanding service as a leader for a minimum of 10 years; demonstrated ongoing leadership competency with the Association and the HI profession; adhered to and advocated for the AHIMA Code of Ethics and other appropriate codes of conduct; valued honesty, integrity, and transparency; worked as a team player and collaborator; is recognized as a qualified authority in the HI profession; and presents a positive professional image for the Association and the profession.



**ANN NOWLIN,  
RHIT**

AHIMA is proud to present the 2021 AHIMA Leadership Triumph Award to **Ann Nowlin, RHIT**. Nowlin is President of AMN, LLC and serves in various capacities as the Central Office Coordinator for six state HIM associations. She has also served in a variety of volunteer roles in her state association as well as on the AHIMA nominating committee.

Nowlin is an exceptional HIM professional and leader. She is extremely knowledgeable, works well with industry partners, and brings exceptional ideas and vision to the various state association boards she works with. Nowlin has a sharing personality and is a gracious and patient mentor to new board and committee members. Nowlin spends countless hours making sure that communication and information sharing between the various committees and membership is optimized. She is always the most prepared and the first to arrive and the last to leave a meeting. Nowlin works intimately with executive committees, as well as the education, advocacy, and communications committees, volunteers, award recipients, and more. She ensures a positive experience for all who interact with the state association websites, elections, and educational offerings.

Her commitment to the HI profession is strong and anchored in AHIMA's mission. She relishes challenges and opportunities that are present in a diverse association with wide ranging needs and nuances. She is equally at home with the myriad of skills and intricacies of detail-oriented day-to-day administrative work with the broader scope of assisting with the continued development and promotion of the association.

Nowlin promotes HI as a viable and successful career path for any who have chosen it. She is a trustworthy colleague and exceptional leader.



**TRIUMPH  
AWARDS**  
*Mentor*

The **MENTOR AWARD** honors individuals or groups with long records of encouraging individuals to realize their full potential or have helped them find ways to achieve their best.



**SHANNON H. HOUSER,  
PH.D, MPH, RHIA, FAHIMA**

AHIMA is honored to present **Shannon H. Houser, Ph.D, MPH, RHIA, FAHIMA**, the Mentor Award. Dr. Houser is a Tenured Professor at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB), the Department of Health Services Administration, a Visiting Professor at the China Tsinghua University and an Associate Scientist for the Center for AIDS Research at UAB. Dr. Houser is a member of the executive board for the Alabama Health Information Management Association (AAHIM). Dr. Houser is also a member of the AHIMA Foundation Research Network (AFRN) Population Health Workgroup where she is and has been the Chair and team leader since 2019.

Dr. Houser has 28 years of experience as a health informatics and information management (HIM) educator. She has demonstrated exemplary mentorship by guiding HIM professionals, educators, and students toward new opportunities through the professional lens of research.

Under Dr. Houser's leadership and mentoring, AFRN has accomplished amazing research outcomes, resulting in six completed and proposed research outcomes, four peer-review journal publications, and eight presentations at national and regional conferences in less than two years.

Dr. Houser has transformed the lives and careers of many individuals through her mentorship skills, motivation, and commitment to developing and inspiring future professionals. She builds trust in a research community, engages, and supports individuals along their research or HIM pathways.

Dr. Houser chairs the Research and Data Analytics Committee for AAHIM and volunteers as a mentor to AAHIM members. Her consistent mentoring and promotion of the value of the RHIA credential in research is a strong contribution to the global HIM profession.





The **RISING STAR AWARD** honors up-and-coming HI professionals who have been employed for five or fewer years from the date of entry in the HI profession.



**PHILLIP DUONG,  
MS, RHIA, CCA**

This year's AHIMA Rising Star Triumph Award recipient is **Phillip Duong, MS, RHIA, CCA**. Duong works at Nemours Children's Hospital in Orlando, Florida, and is active in his component state association. He holds several leadership roles, presents at the annual meetings, and mentors students on the HIM profession. He has also volunteered with AHIMA since 2016 and is currently serving on the Conference Program Committee.

Duong holds a Master's degree in biomedical science and a Bachelor's degree in HIM. His instructors and peers describe him as a problem-solver, thought leader, strong project manager and a dedicated professional. His work experience includes work in billing, clinical documentation integrity, and revenue integrity where he consistently demonstrates dedication and professionalism.

In Duong's short time in the HIM profession he has proven to be an up-and-coming star by showing commitment and excitement for the HIM profession. Duong has earned many accolades for his volunteer roles, including the Florida Health Information Management's (FHIMA) Outstanding New Professional Award and two scholarships from FHIMA and the Central Florida Health Information Management Association. His passion for advocacy and public policy led him to advance legislative initiatives that promote the interests and awareness of the HIM profession at many levels and helped organize the FHIMA Hill Day in 2018 and 2019. To promote AHIMA and the FHIMA meetings Duong utilizes social media to keep members engaged by posting videos to YouTube and Facebook and contributing to blogs.



The **STUDENT AWARD** recognizes and encourages the best of the fresh new talent being trained in CAHIIM accredited or AHIMA approved coding programs nationwide.



## JOAN RODRIGUEZ GONZALEZ

AHIMA is proud to announce the selection of **Joan Rodríguez González**, as the recipient of the 2021 AHIMA Student Triumph Award. Among all the responsibilities of being a student with a full-time job, he assumed the challenge to participate in health information volunteer work.

González completed a Bachelor's in Business Administration with a minor in Information Systems. Seeking to combine his passion for the Informatics, he persevered and completed a Master's degree in Health Information Management (HIM).

As a student, González demonstrates the commitment with the program, classmates, and the profession. In addition to fulfilling the role of class president, González participated in program activities such as welcoming and bidding farewell to the students of the program and volunteering in the Medical Sciences Campus of COVID-19 immunizations data entry register.

González actively collaborates with both the HIM Graduate Program at the University of Puerto Rico and the Puerto Rico Health Information Management Association (PRHIMA). He demonstrates his leadership by representing the student community with PRHIMA as the Student Liaison and a member of the PRHIMA Awareness committee. In addition, he has stood out as a student representative in the Advisory Committee.

Regarding his attitude, González, was always ethical, responsible, respectful, and a leader and he demonstrates it with his commitment, professionalism dedication, high sense of responsibility, effective communication he has with the program, classmates, and HIM profession.

AHIMA congratulates González as the recipient of the 2021 AHIMA Student Triumph Award.



# TRIUMPH AWARDS

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