

Tips on Career Advancement Include Finance, Enterprise Risk Management

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Patient safety continues to be a primary focus in risk management. Those interested in advancing their careers also might look to data science and finance.

- Enterprise risk management should be part of your career plan.
 - The popularity of captive insurance companies puts a premium on finance knowledge.
 - Data science is increasingly central to understanding risk.
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Patient safety should be a top priority for risk managers hoping to advance their careers, and financial management may be another way to set yourself apart from the crowd.

There is a marked trend toward the importance of patient safety, says Arnold Mackles, MD, MBA, LHRM, president of Innovative Healthcare Compliance Group in Beach Gardens, FL. “Risk managers have traditionally been concerned with the reporting and investigation of adverse events, claim management, and overseeing the organization’s liability insurance policies. Risk managers are now becoming more involved with creating an environment that provides safe, quality patient care,” Mackles says. “As a matter of fact, many hospitals now recruit for the position of director of patient safety and risk management.”

Given this trend, it would be wise for risk managers and others aspiring to work in this arena to consider membership in professional organizations that specialize in patient safety, such as the American Society of Professionals in Patient Safety (ASPPS), Mackles says. He strongly recommends obtaining a certification as a Certified Professional in Patient Safety (CPPS).

Mackles notes the recent merger of two influential organizations in the patient safety field, the National Patient Safety Foundation (NPSF) and the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI), which he says is further evidence of the growing focus on patient safety.

Another trend that is receiving widespread acceptance is the notion of a “culture of safety” in healthcare organizations, Mackles says. “The future will see risk managers playing important roles in creating environments that are open and transparent, where the reporting of medical errors and unsafe practices is rewarded rather than punished,” Mackles says. “Other hallmarks of a culture of safety include constant striving for safer care, cooperation and communication across all specialties and hierarchies, buy-in and support by leadership, and an obligation of healthcare administrators to resolve safety issues.”

Risk managers wanting more expertise in data science should look to gaining a foundation in several areas, says Craig Johnson, founder and chief science officer at Decision Point Healthcare Solutions, a data and technology company based in Boston. He recommends the following four areas:

- Clinical or business subject matter expertise: a working knowledge of the stakeholders, business processes, data collected and used by those processes, and how information is shared within and across those processes.
- Feature and data engineering: ability to identify and design key clinical/business data features, characterize the relationships between those features, and how to best represent those features in data.
- Programming: ability to program in a functional programming language like python, analytic tools like R, and database languages like SQL.
- Technical methods: understanding of the conceptual methods and application of those methods in solving clinical/business problems. Technically oriented pathways will dive deeper in to algorithm programming and development.

“With these underlying experiences/skill sets, data scientists can focus on building deeper skills focused on a business or technology track,” Johnson says. “Entry to the technical data science track typically follows undergraduate and graduate study in data analytics, data science, physics, mathematics, or operations research. Subject matter expertise and feature engineering skills can be learned during the first few years on the job.”

Entry to the business data science track typically follows several years of on-the-job experience as a clinical or business data analyst, then going back to school for a degree in data analysis or data science, Johnson says. Exceptions to this include undergraduate/graduate programs like healthcare and nursing informatics, and business degrees with concentrations in data analytics. However, these programs do not typically provide sufficient depth in the underlying technical side of data science, he says.

Finance is another route to consider, suggests M. Michael Zuckerman, JD, MBA, ACI, professor in the department of risk, insurance, and healthcare management at Temple University Fox School of Business and Management in Philadelphia.

Clinical risk managers who want to broaden their risk management capabilities should consider pursuing the Associate in Captive Insurance professional designation from the International Center for Captive Insurance Education (ICCIE).

“Most healthcare systems employ captive insurance companies, and this designation does provide courses in alternative risk financing, reinsurance, and healthcare captive overview,” Zuckerman says. “This is by far the most rigorous alternative risk financing and captive insurance educational material available. It is taught online by industry professionals.”

Enterprise risk management (ERM) also should be considered for career advancement, suggests Jay Lechtman, senior director of healthcare market strategy and development for Riskconnect, a healthcare ERM software vendor. “When I ask patient safety and risk managers if their organizations are getting into enterprise risk management, they too often wave vaguely toward compliance and the executive suite and say ‘they’re doing it ... over there,’”

Lechtman says. “Traditional risk managers have a significant career opportunity to elevate and broaden their current roles by getting involved in ERM, and a significant career risk if they don’t.”

Lechtman recalls talking recently to a health system compliance vice president who is driving her organization’s ERM initiative. When he asked her about the patient safety and patient grievance teams, she admitted that she didn’t really know what they did.

“These and other traditional risk managers will be committing career suicide if they aren’t connecting what they do every day with clinical, financial, operational, regulatory, and strategic risks and the value they bring to the organization at the highest levels,” he says. “It seems strange to me that enterprise risk management in healthcare is very often not being led by — sometimes not even with the participation of — traditional healthcare risk managers.”

Don’t think of ERM as a separate, siloed function, Lechtman advises. Instead, think of it as managing risk across the enterprise.

“It seems like a natural evolution and a logical expansion in role for traditional risk managers who can be flexible, strategic, and comfortable with executive leadership and boards of directors,” he says.

SOURCES

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