
ADDRESS DELIVERED BY

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“Data Governance and Data Protection in Health Systems: Safeguarding Health Data in the Digital Era”

Representative of the Minister of Health; RDHS - UER

The President of GHIMA – Mr. Richard Delali Ahedor

Members of GHIMA NEC; Representatives of the Allied Health Professions Council;

WHO Strategic Information Officer; Distinguished GHIMA Members;

Health Information Professionals; Partners and Invited Guests; Members of the Press;

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning.

It is a privilege and an honour to join you at the **11th Annual General Meeting** of the Ghana Health Information Management Association. On behalf of the Director-General and the GHS Leadership, I bring you warm greetings, and sincere commendation for the work you do. This year's theme - ***“Towards an Integrated Digital Health Ecosystem: Implementing the Ghana Health Information Management System; the Role of the Health Information Professional”*** - could not be timelier. It speaks directly to a transformation already under way across our health sector. I am especially pleased to address the sub-theme, ***“Data Governance and Data Protection in Health Systems: Safeguarding Health Data in the Digital Era.”***

Ladies and Gentlemen, At the heart of every successful health system lies one critical asset: **data**. Data informs planning. Data guides decision-making. Data supports resource allocation. Data enables monitoring and evaluation. Data helps us detect disease trends early, measure performance, assess health outcomes, and determine whether our interventions are achieving their intended impact. **Put simply:** without quality data, there can be no effective planning, no meaningful monitoring, and no evidence-based decision-making.

This conviction runs through the ***GHS Strategic Plan 2026 - 2030***, which positions health information management as a key pillar for improving service delivery and advancing **UHC**. The Plan is clear that strong health information systems are essential for measuring progress, strengthening accountability, and ensuring the efficient use of resources at every level of the health system. As we digitise our health information processes and expand electronic systems from the DHIMS2, to the national platform we are now implementing, the volume of health data available to us continues to grow. **But more data does not, by itself, mean better decisions.** The value of data depends on its quality, its integrity, its accessibility to those who need it, and the responsibility with which it is used. **This is where data governance becomes indispensable.** Data governance refers to the structures, policies, standards, and processes that ensure health information is collected, managed, protected, and used consistently and lawfully across the health system. Effective data governance helps us answer questions that are deceptively simple:

- **Is the data accurate?**
- **Is it complete?**
- **Is it timely?**
- **Can decision-makers trust it?**
- **Is patient information adequately protected?**
- **Are we meeting our legal and ethical obligations?**

These are not merely technical questions. They are management and governance questions and the answers shape real health outcomes.

Distinguished Colleagues, And let me be clear: in Ghana, data governance is not an abstract aspiration. It rests on a firm legal foundation. **Article 18(2) of our 1992 Constitution** guarantees every person the right to privacy. The **Data Protection Act, 2012 (Act 843)** gives that right practical effect regulating how personal data is collected, processed, stored, and shared, and establishing the **Data Protection Commission** to enforce compliance. For us in health, one provision deserves particular attention. Under Act 843, information about a person's physical or mental health is classified as ***“special personal data”*** - a category the law singles out for the **highest level of protection**. In

other words, the health records we generate every single day are, in the eyes of the law, among the most sensitive data a citizen can ever entrust to anyone.

The Act sets obligations that should guide our daily practice: collect only what is necessary, and for a clearly specified purpose; keep data accurate and up to date; safeguard it with appropriate security measures; retain it no longer than needed; and, where a breach occurs, notify both the Data Protection Commission and the affected individuals without delay. And where data is processed or hosted beyond our borders, increasingly common in an era of cloud services - the law expects us to ensure that those handling our citizens' data meet equivalent standards of protection. Compliance with Act 843, then, is not a ceiling to aspire to. It is the floor on which all good practice must stand.

Ladies and Gentlemen, One of the greatest challenges facing health systems globally is not the absence of data, but the quality of the data available for decision-making. Poor-quality data leads to flawed planning assumptions, inefficient allocation of scarce resources, inaccurate assessments of performance, and missed opportunities to intervene where it matters most. This is why you as health information professionals are so central to the system. **You** are the custodians of data quality. **You** ensure the completeness, accuracy, consistency, and timeliness of the information generated from our facilities and programmes. **You** equip managers, clinicians, programme officers, and policymakers with reliable information for action. **You** provide the evidence on which planning, budgeting, monitoring, and evaluation all depend. In truth, a health system is only as strong as the quality of the information that guides its decisions.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Alongside governance sits the equally weighty responsibility of data protection. Patients place in our hands the most intimate details of their lives - their diagnoses, their treatments, their histories, their family circumstances. Protecting that information is at once a **legal duty under Act 843** and a profound ethical obligation. The confidence Ghanaians place in our health system rests, in no small part, on their trust that what they tell us will be handled responsibly, confidentially, and with respect for their dignity and their rights. Data protection must never be reduced to a **box-ticking exercise**. It is a fundamental component of quality, patient-centred care. Every health worker, every manager, and every health information

professional shares the duty to ensure that health data is collected only for legitimate purposes, accessed only by those authorised to see it, and used in ways that honour the dignity of the patient.

Distinguished Participants, The digital era sharpens both the promise and the peril. A paper folder could be misplaced; a digital system can be breached at scale. As we connect facilities, integrate systems, and move data across networks and, at times, across borders, we expand not only the value of our data but also its exposure. Cyber-attacks on health systems are no longer a distant, foreign concern; ransomware and data breaches have disrupted hospitals around the world, and we would be unwise to imagine ourselves immune. Ghana's own framework - the **Cybersecurity Act, 2020 (Act 1038)** and the Cyber Security Authority, alongside our regional commitments under the ECOWAS framework and the **African Union's Malabo Convention**, exists precisely because the threat is real, and shared. This is why the move toward a nationally-owned, integrated digital health ecosystem matters so profoundly. When we implement the **Ghana Health Information Management System**, we are not merely changing software. We are affirming that the health data of Ghanaians is a national asset to be governed under our laws, secured to our standards, and held in trust for our people. That is data sovereignty, and it is the right foundation. But a system is only ever as trustworthy as the governance built into it and the professionals who run it. Security and privacy cannot be bolted on at the end; they must be designed in from the start and sustained, every day, by people like you. Importantly it is the professionalism, the standards, and the stewardship of GHIMA's members that will determine whether GHIMS, and every system that comes after it, earns and keeps the trust of the Ghanaian people

Ladies and Gentlemen, As Ghana advances toward an integrated digital health ecosystem, the role of the Health Information Professional grows larger, not smaller. The health information professional of tomorrow must go beyond record-keeping and reporting. **You** must become leaders in data governance, champions of data quality, advocates for evidence-based decision-making, and guardians of patient confidentiality. **You** must help build a culture in which data is not merely collected, but actively used

to improve outcomes, strengthen accountability, and drive continuous improvement across the sector. And I encourage **GHIMA**, as a professional body, to keep raising the bar, strengthening professional standards, and investing in capacity building, mentorship, and continuous professional development, so that your members remain equipped, both technically and ethically, for the demands ahead. For in this field, competence without conscience is not enough; we need both.

Ladies and Gentlemen, The success of our health system depends not only on the services we deliver, but on the quality and integrity of the information that informs them. So, as we implement the GHS Strategic Plan 2026 - 2030, advance toward **UHC**, and stand up our national digital health platform, let us renew our commitment on three fronts:

- 1. Let us strengthen data quality** so that every decision rests on evidence we can trust.
- 2. Let us strengthen data governance** so that our systems are accountable, lawful, and well-managed.
- 3. And let us strengthen data protection** so that we safeguard, jealously, the trust that patients place in us.

Do this, and health information management ceases to be a **back-office function**. It becomes what it truly is - **a strategic enabler of health-sector performance, and of our national development.**

On behalf of the Director-General and Leadership of the GHS, I congratulate GHIMA on its continued contribution to strengthening health information management in Ghana, and I wish you fruitful deliberations and a most successful conference.

God bless GHIMA.

God bless the Ghana Health Service.

And God bless our homeland, Ghana.

Thank you.