

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

Denise Hines to head HIMSS in 2017

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The need for comprehensive electronic health records (EHR) has grabbed headlines over the past few years, but launching such a system in Georgia has been **Denise Hines'** goal for decades.

Hines is CEO of **eHealth Services Group** and chair-elect of the **National Healthcare Informational and Management Systems Society (HIMSS)**, whose mission is to transform health care in the United States and Canada through information technology.

Hines has lived in the Peach State for most of her life, but she spent her early years in inner city Philadelphia.

"It was a rough and tough environment, gangs were around, so we didn't grow up with silver spoons per se," Hines said. "We left there when I was 10, but by then I knew how to get around the city on public transportation. And we walked to school in the snow."

Fairburn, Ga., with all its trees and green grass, was a huge difference for Hines from the big city. Her family relocated after her brother, a member of the U.S. Navy, was killed in active duty. They chose Georgia because her mother's sister lived here.

"My mother had a hard time dealing with the loss, so she moved us to Georgia to start our lives over and deal with the mourning," Hines said.

Watching television shows like "Quincy, M.E." and "General Hospital" made Hines realize she wanted to be in health care from a very young age. She was also inspired to get into the field by her mother, a nurse, and oldest sister, a medical office assistant.

"The influence of health care was all around me, and I just knew that service of helping others was really where I wanted to go," Hines said.

Her first health-related job was as a nursing assistant at age 18, and she earned her certification while she was an undergraduate.

"I took care of patients, giving them baths, turning them, changing linens, showering and shaving them," she said. "Its backbreaking work, but it's rewarding."

Hines decided earning her medical degree would take too long, and she found out nursing wasn't a perfect fit because she gets squeamish about blood. That's how she got into health-care administration.

After doing administrative work for a home health agency, Hines landed her first health information systems related job at **First Data Corp.** in 1994. She set up a predictive filing system and called people to ask about their past due medical bills.

"That was when I realized something is not right with our health-care system," Hines said. "These people have these huge balances, knowing they



Denise Hines, CEO of eHealth Services Group, is chair-elect of the National Healthcare Informational Management Systems Society, or HIMSS, in 2017.

JOANN VITELLI

can't pay. Something is off."

Hines was working concurrently on her master's degree at **Mercer University**. She said she has always been a multitasker. During the same time period, she also met and married her husband.

Then a friend who worked for IBM called and recruited Hines to help the company establish an electronic medical records system.

"It was right after the Olympics, I remember," she said. "I think IBM was ahead of its time. We had large health systems in Iowa, Alabama and Arkansas."

But IBM's system ran into interoperability issues, which health systems still face today, and the company started losing clients. In 1999, Hines left to work for **Southern Regional Health System** to help it navigate potential Y2K issues.

"It was such a unique experience," she said. "I was the person who knew every piece of equipment, every system. Anything that had a computer chip, I had to know where it was. I had to have a contingency plan for if ambulances couldn't run or stop lights didn't work."

Southern Regional sailed through Y2K with no problems, and Hines was

promoted to director of application services for IT of the hospital. After that, she worked for two years as a consultant for Georgia's Department of Community Health to help it develop state plans for health IT. But she knew that what she really wanted to do was start her own company.

Hines in 2011 founded **eHealth Services Group**, which provides operations staffing for the **Georgia Health Information Network (GaHIN)**, a public-private partnership working to establish a statewide health information exchange.

"She's amazing, I don't know how she does it," said **Lynn Hood**, marketing manager of GaHIN and a friend of Hines. "She's a wonderful boss, she gives great guidance. She tells you what she wants you to do and gives you the resources to get it done."

Her company also reaches out to hospitals to educate them about the benefits of EHRs and then implements these technologies for them.

"It's so important, because we need to make sure that health care providers have the information they need to make informed decisions for their patients,"

DENISE HINES

Age: 46

Born in: Philadelphia

Lives in: Fayetteville, Ga.

Current job: CEO, eHealth Services Group

Former job: Director of outreach and education for Georgia Health IT Regional Extension

Education: B.S., Albany State University; Master of science, Mercer University; Ph.D., health-care administration from University of Phoenix

Family: Husband, Wyley Hines Jr., seven children

Hobbies: Piano, sports, singing in church choir

Hines said. "The challenges include competing resources within the health-care organization and competing priorities. Hospitals are challenged with keeping the doors open, and now they're challenged with implementing these technologies."

Next year, Hines will be chair of National HIMSS, which is a huge distinction, said **Dennis White**, chair of GaHIN and CEO of **Alliant Health**.

"She's a superstar," White said. "HIMSS is one of those places where the brightest minds in health IT meet. To be chair is a phenomenal accomplishment."

White said Hines rose up the ranks of HIMSS' board quickly. She was president of the Georgia chapter from 2010 to 2012, then joined the national board in 2014. In fiscal 2014 she was also chair of the national board's finance committee.

"She truly is a thought leader in this area on a national level," Hood said.

The organization has 64,000 members, 40,000 of whom meet up once a year for a conference and exhibition of the latest in Health IT. In 2017, the convention will be held in Orlando from Feb. 19 to 23.

Hines estimates Georgia is only about 50 percent done with implementing a statewide exchange, but she believes the state is on the right track.

"Georgia stands out because we had really good cooperation from our state agencies and providers," Hines said. "I think we've had the ability to be innovative and at the forefront of taking on some of these challenges, of addressing the barriers of these technologies."

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If you know any executive whose hobby – or day job – is unusual enough to be in print contact Lisa R. Schoolcraft at lschoolcraft@bizjournals.com.