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## RESOURCE CENTER

By Michelle Martin

# Career Development Is Imperative

**With responsibilities shifting and the industry evolving, ongoing professional development has never been more critical.**

Using data effectively has become increasingly important in the health care field, as providers have realized the impact good information can have on improving quality of care and lowering health care costs. As gatekeepers to this important data, HIM professionals have gained more responsibility as heavier weight has been placed on ensuring the quality and security of patient information.

The demand for high quality patient data has spurred the need for more specificity in coding, increasing the educational requirements for HIM professionals because detailed coding requires more clinical knowledge. At the same time, technology, such as the introduction of EHRs, is rapidly changing the HIM professional's role. Government stimulus funds pushing EHR implementation are expected to create at least 50,000 new jobs in the field and will require many current professionals to perform new tasks.

With responsibilities shifting and the industry evolving, ongoing professional development has never been more critical for HIM professionals. To ensure they are staying current in the industry and continually enhancing their skills, seasoned HIM professionals should take advantage of the many professional development programs available, especially those offered by the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA).

AHIMA offers a variety of education programs, including audio seminars and Webinars, for HIM professionals who may not be able to prepare for new industry requirements or learn about new technology on the job. Programs like these can help HIM professionals understand the important roles they will play in the transition to EHRs. These roles will not only include responsibility for converting paper records to electronic and putting EHRs into practice, but also overseeing how EHRs are being used at facilities to ensure hospitals, physicians and others become meaningful users of EHRs, adhering to federal guidelines.

### STAYING CURRENT WITH CODING

HIM professionals must also stay current on industry updates—including new code changes—and frequently refresh their coding skills. ICD-10, set to launch in 2013, will require focused professional development for HIM staff. This new, highly detailed code set will require coders to have a strong foundation in biological sciences and human anatomy in order

to select more specific codes.

While training on the new system is not yet encouraged because the implementation date is still a few years away, it is important for HIM professionals to evaluate their knowledge now in areas like anatomy and physiology, pharmacology, pathophysiology and medical terminology to pinpoint education needs. HIM professionals should then seek out opportunities to brush up in the areas where they find their knowledge lacking.

With many employers offering tuition reimbursement to staff and education programs available through AHIMA, most HIM professionals should not find continuing education opportunities out of reach. As the ICD-10 launch nears, many health care providers will likely provide on-site education for HIM staff.

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For these proactive facilities, staffing partners can provide assistance with educational initiatives. Many staffing firms offer on-site education and Webinars covering ICD-10 readiness and other industry updates. Other professional development programs like coding boot camps can help take coders to the next skill level. In addition, advanced coding boot camps can help experienced outpatient coders develop their inpatient coding skills. After an initial education session, staffing partners can even return on a quarterly basis to conduct refresher courses, if needed.

As the industry moves forward with the transition to EHRs and ICD-10, many veteran professionals may choose to retire rather than learn new systems. But for those who choose to remain, as well as students, recent graduates and new professionals, there will be new opportunities as well as new challenges—along with the educational opportunities to help them grow and succeed in their profession. For these individuals, this should be a particularly exciting and rewarding time in their careers. ■

*Michelle Martin is group vice president of Kforce Healthcare Staffing ([www.kforce.com](http://www.kforce.com)), a professional staffing firm providing contract and direct hire staffing for HIM departments. Consultant services include onsite and/or offsite delivery of coding specialists, APC and DRG audits, HIM directors, transcriptionists, certified tumor registrars, trauma registrars and other outsourced personnel. Contact Martin at [mmartin@kforce.com](mailto:mmartin@kforce.com).*

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