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RESOURCE CENTER

Coding: Going Remote

Remote coders can have a significant impact on a facility's revenue cycle.

As more and more facilities transition to EHRs, the use of home-based remote coders is gaining in popularity as an efficient alternative to in-house coding.

Remote coding removes geographic barriers and allows access to a larger pool of coders. It is especially attractive to rural facilities that want to employ more experienced coders who reside outside of their immediate geographic area.

Remote coders and a properly designed and implemented workflow automation system can have a significant impact on a facility's revenue cycle. Combined, they streamline the entire process, from online chart viewing to coding and abstracting to invoice generation.

Other benefits of remote coding include:

- **Improved coder productivity:** Without office distractions, remote coders have demonstrated improvements in productivity of up to 32 percent, according to some case studies.
- **Better recruiting and retention results:** Most hospitals that allow coders to work from home report fewer vacancies. Some even have waiting lists of qualified coder applicants.
- **Additional space for equipment and other personnel:** Remote coders are a great solution for space-restricted facilities.
- **Improved morale:** Flexible schedules and the ability to work from home increase job satisfaction.

For multi-hospital health systems, remote coding has extra advantages because coders can log in to the system in any of the facilities to clear up backlogs wherever they exist.

Annual third-party mandatory audits are also more efficient and cost-effective when a remote coding system is in place. Remote auditors eliminate travel expenses and can even review records more frequently to promote productivity or target problem-prone areas.

REMOTE CONCERNS

Certainly a remote coding operation is not without challenges. With remote coding being a computer-dependent system, technical issues and a slow system can result in lost productivity.

Of even greater importance are concerns related to security and privacy. A remote coder requires a private space with a computer solely dedicated to coding according to HIPAA.

As an alternative to outfitting home-based coders with separate computers, health care facilities may opt to use a staffing firm's remote coders. They often issue laptops to the remote coders or use special USB drives to block out other programs on



the computer system. In addition, they are held to the American Health Information Management Association recommended standards of 95 percent coding accuracy. These coders are audited by their employers to make sure they meet privacy and productivity standards.

Facilities considering a move to remote coding should understand the financial investment can be significant. A portal must be established so remote coders can log in to the health care facility's system to input codes. In addition, workflow automation software and scanning hardware are required to scan charts to be viewable online. Facilities that choose to use a staffing partner to assist with remote coding will have fewer worries with regard to scanning expenses or software training because most staffing firms can provide this.

While costly, portals and scanning software/hardware can be viewed as investments toward total conversion to EHRs. Even when a facility uses EHRs, there may still be occasions when handwritten documents, such as physician progress notes, must be scanned and added to a patient's record. With a portal and system for scanning charts and viewing them online, remote coding facilities will already have the technology in place and will be one step ahead in the EHR conversion process. ■

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