

RESOURCE CENTER

By Michelle Martin

Preparing Now for ICD-10

HIM professionals must understand that furthering their careers depends on their ability to adapt to the new coding system.

Taking a look at where the health care industry is headed provides some important clues to the career development needs of HIM professionals. ICD-10 will require specialized professional development for the credentialed professional. With the 2013 transition to ICD-10 looming in the future, HIM professionals must understand that furthering their careers depends on their ability to adapt to the new coding system and to gain more detailed knowledge of its clinical underpinnings.

The implementation of ICD-10 will bring with it greater detail and specificity in coding. While ICD-9 includes a total of 17,000 codes, ICD-10-CM has 68,000 codes and ICD-10-PCS encompasses 87,000 codes. This highly detailed code set will require coders to have a strong foundation in biological sciences and human anatomy in order to select a more detailed, specific code.

ICD-10 is significantly different in structure and organization than ICD-9. ICD-10 will use alphanumeric codes rather than the completely numeric codes of ICD-9, and the field size will increase to seven characters. In addition, most definitions will change with the new system.

With the launch of ICD-10 still a few years away, experts agree it is too early for coders to begin training on the new system and learning new codes. Early training is not likely to be effective given that coders may have difficulty retaining what they learn about ICD-10 while still coding according to ICD-9. However, it is never too soon to begin to gain the fundamental skills necessary to be successful in the realm of ICD-10.

GETTING EDUCATED

For coding professionals, education is crucial to ICD-10 preparation. With plenty of time left to gear up for ICD-10, the wise coder will assess his or her knowledge now in areas like anatomy and physiology, pharmacology, pathophysiology and medical terminology to identify education needs. Coders should then seek out opportunities to prepare themselves in the areas where they find their knowledge lacking.

For many coding professionals, enrolling in educational

courses in anatomy and physiology and pharmacology may be a smart choice. Coders who have not taken an anatomy course within the last 10 years should consider taking one. With many employers offering tuition reimbursement to staff, and Webinars and education programs available through various associations, most HIM professionals should not find continuing education opportunities out of reach.

It is likely that as the ICD-10 launch nears, many health care providers will step up and provide on-site education for HIM staff. Those providers that choose to proactively educate staff must determine how education programs will be conducted, as well as which staff members should be educated and on what levels education should take place. ICD-10 requires education not just for HIM professionals but for every department within the revenue cycle.

Ongoing training and professional development will be vital as the industry moves closer to ICD-10, and it may be necessary for health care providers to have a long-term partner who can assist not just in on-going education but also in training on the new system. To assist these health care providers with ICD-10 education initiatives, many staffing firms offer on-site education and Webinars covering the biological science fundamentals coders will need to be successful in the ICD-10 world. After an initial education session, staffing partners can even return on a quarterly basis to conduct refresher courses to ensure coders are comfortable with the content.

ICD-10 competence is critical to the future of HIM.

With many advanced coders who have been working in the field for 10-15 years planning to retire rather than learn the new ICD-10 system, coding professionals with the proper amount of education are sure to be in high demand in the next several years. Wise HIM professionals will invest in their futures now to gain the valuable skills necessary to be successful in the ICD-10 environment. ■

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