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By Michelle Martin

RESOURCE CENTER

Staying on Top of Advances

Working with a long-term staffing partner can give HIM staffs the backing they need to navigate new developments in the field.

AS THE HEALTH CARE industry evolves, bringing new technology, advanced coding systems and more stringent HIPAA regulations, HIM directors must use their resources wisely. This applies particularly to choices made in selecting, training and retaining staff. It's critical that HIM managers and employees alike be well prepared for the new environment and its requirements.

Industry leaders expect that government stimulus funds for EHR implementation will create at least 50,000 new jobs in the HIM field. Along with new positions, stimulus funds will likely create a need for temporary PRN staff to assist with EHR implementation projects. To assist with both short-term staffing and the hiring of new HIM professionals, many health care facilities are turning to staffing firms because of their ability to provide well-qualified candidates in a quick and cost-effective manner.

Allowing the HIM director to maintain a greater focus on changing regulations, staffing firms can assume a consultative role to identify the various levels of staffing needs and recommend the right staffing solutions, whether it's short-term help to alleviate coding backlogs or cover staff shortages or a longer-term outsourcing plan. The benefits of this type of consultation include:

- **Broad industry experience.** Staffing firms have the benefit of having advised organizations of all sizes with a full range of needs, and have been able to test various staffing methodologies to arrive at the most efficacious solution.
- **Expertise.** Staffing firms recruit top talent and provide rigorous training and professional development for their consultants. HIM consultants focus on keeping any credentials they may have, staying up to date with industry changes and continually honing their skills.
- **Specialized staff.** Each consultant focuses on a specific area within the HIM field. Depending on a facility's needs, staffing firms can provide staff in a number of areas, including medical and clinical coding, chart assembly and analysis, cancer registry, trauma registry and transcription. They can also provide interim management, education and staff who specialize in unique HIM projects.
- **Pre-screened candidates.** Using a staffing firm eliminates human resources hassles. Staffing firms handle the background checks, testing and training for their professionals, making

partnering with a staffing firm more cost-effective.

- **Quality assurance.** Consultants are held to the highest standards and must be compliant with government regulations, including new HIPAA requirements under the HITECH Act.

- **Insurance.** Staffing firms carry professional liability insurance, reducing the risks a health care facility takes on when working with an outside service provider.

So how will an HIM director know when it's time to bring in outside help? Directors should keep an eye on the efficiency of their department and monitor for any coding backlogs. If a backlog exists, thorough review of the revenue cycle can help a director appropriately diagnose the issue resulting in the backlog. Once this is identified, a staffing firm can match the facility with the particular type of consultant needed and quickly provide help to alleviate the backlog.

To help detect backlogs and other issues, many staffing firms provide audit services to health care facilities. Audits are critical to revenue cycle management, and facilities should frequently analyze revenue cycle and coding performance to identify opportunities for improvement. Accurate coding ensures maximum reimbursement in compliance with regulatory guidelines, which is becoming more challenging to achieve with today's complex payment system.

Staffing firms offer consultants who can perform a number of audits and workflow assessments to identify issues and opportunities to improve the revenue cycle. They work with coders and other staff to analyze processes and make recommendations for improvement. Many staffing firms also offer on-site education and Webinars on industry updates for facilities that want to ensure that existing staff are receiving necessary training and professional development.

Now more than ever, HIM directors must build a strong team that is ready for new systems and responsibilities. Working with a long-term staffing partner to provide staffing assistance, periodic audits and staff education programs can give HIM staff the backing they need to successfully navigate new developments in the HIM landscape. ■

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