A CAREER IN MEDICAL CODING

What is Coding?

Coding is translating the written medical documentation into a numeric form. Some examples are:

- Anterolateral myocardial infarction (heart attack) is I21.09
- Right intertrochanteric femoral fracture (broken hip) is S72.131A
- Percutaneous transluminal coronary angioplasty (balloon angioplasty) is 02Q03ZZ using the ICD-10-PCS coding system and 92982 using the CPT coding system.
- Right total hip replacement is 0SR9029 using the ICD-10-PCS coding system and 27130 using the CPT coding system.

Why is Coding Done?

Coded information serves many purposes, some of which are:

- **Reimbursement** - codes are printed on the claims submitted to the insurance companies, Medicare, and Medicaid. Third party payers will pay the health care facility and/or the physician based on the codes for the diagnoses and procedures/services performed.

- **Research** - physicians can access medical records for research purposes based on coded information. For example, a physician may request to see the medical records for all patients who were treated for gastric (stomach) ulcers in the past two years. These records would be identified in a computer list of patients with diagnosis codes of K25.0-K25.9.

- **Public health** - a government or public health agency may use coded diagnostic information to track the occurrence of certain diseases. For example, they may find an increased incidence of a certain type of cancer in a certain region of the country.

- **Patient care** - a medical device manufacturer may issue a recall on a specific device, such as a pacemaker, and the records of such patients could be retrieved based on the procedure code for pacemaker insertion. The physicians could then contact the patients.
What Knowledge Must a Coding Specialist Possess?

The coding specialist must have a strong background in:

- body structure and function
- medical terminology
- disease process (pathophysiology)
- medical record content
- ICD-10-CM Coding
- ICD-10-PCS Coding
- CPT Coding
- reimbursement systems

What Attributes are Desirable in a Coding Specialist?

- **Detail-oriented** - attention to all the little details about patients’ conditions and treatments is necessary for accurate coding.

- **Independent worker** - coding specialists often work with minimal direction and supervision.

- **Communication skills** - must be able to communicate, both orally and written, with physicians and other health care providers.

- **Enjoy learning** - the medical field and coding systems continually change requiring life-long learning.

- **Passion for medical information** - coding involves reading about patients’ conditions and treatments and continually learning about new diseases and treatments. A passion for this type of information makes one’s career as a coding specialist very enjoyable!

What Employment Opportunities Exist for Coding Specialist?

Medical coding specialists are employed in the following settings:

- Hospitals
- Physician Practice Groups
- Clinics
- Managed Care Organizations
- Governmental Agencies
- Consulting Firms
- Skilled Nursing Facilities
- Home Health Agencies
- Insurance Companies
- Coding and Billing Services
- Computer Software Companies
- Veterinary Hospitals

What is the Outlook for Employment?

The US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts that employment in the health information management field will grow faster than average (21% or more) through 2020.

What is the Salary Range for a Coding Specialist?

The 2012 Madison College Graduate Employment Report indicates an average annual salary of $35,640 ($17.27/hour) for graduates of the Basic MCSP.
A 2013 national survey done by the American Academy of Professional Coders (AAPC) indicates the average annual wage for certified coding professionals is $53,489 ($25.72/hour).

A 2010 national survey done by the American Health Information Management Association indicates the average annual salary for a coding professional is $45,607 ($21.92/hour). It also showed that those with mastery-level coding credentials (CCS and CCS-P) garnered higher average salaries than those with entry-level coding credential (CCA). Average annual salaries ranged from $40,196 for CCA credentialed coding specialists to $60,919 for CCS credentialed coding specialists.

As of July 2014, the website www.salary.com indicates the annual salary range for medical coding specialists in the Madison area is $32,486 - $55,938 ($15.61 - $26.89 per hour) with the median salary at $43,339 ($20.84).

What Certification Opportunities Exist for a Coding Specialist?

There are five certification exams that can be taken to earn national coding credentials. The Certified Coding Associate (CCA) exam demonstrates entry-level skills. The other four certification exams demonstrate mastery level (experienced) skills. Becoming credentialed may result in a salary increase and/or promotion.

American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) (www.ahima.org)
- Certified Coding Associate (CCA)
- Certified Coding Specialist (CCS)
- Certified Coding Specialist - Physician-Based (CCS-P)

American Academy of Professional Coders (AAPC) (www.aapc.com)
- Certified Professional Coder (CPC)
- Certified Professional Coder - Hospital-Based (CPC-H)

How Can I Get More Information?

For more information, contact: Rhonda Voelz, MS, RHIA, CCS
Medical Coding Specialist Program
Madison Area Technical College
1701 Wright Street
Madison, WI 53704-2599
608/246-6015
rvoelz@madisoncollege.edu

Revised 7/14