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 December 2013, the website [www.salary.com](http://www.salary.com) indicates the average annual salary range for medical coding specialists in the Madison area is $31,503 - $54,172 ($15.15 - $26.04 per hour).

**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?**
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