

Part B Insider (Multispecialty) Coding Alert

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION: Give Good Employees A Shot At Becoming Coders

A receptionist or scheduler already familiar with your practice will bring more value to the position

Which is better: to hire new coders from outside or to promote from within?

The answer depends on the qualities of your current employees. If you have an employee inside your practice who has already shown dedication and dependability, and you have the ability to train that person, then you should go ahead and make him a coder. But otherwise, the more sensible decision is to bring someone in from outside.

"Coding is not an easy thing to do - not anymore," says **Bill New**, administrator with a physician practice in Auburn, AL. So finding a coder who is "meticulous and understands coding rules" is very important. Otherwise, you could find yourself coping with more denials and falling so far behind that you'll never catch up.

"I have promoted from within our office for coding and billing specialists," reports **Virginia Shepherd**, office manager with **Utah Digestive Health Institute** in Ogden, UT. She makes sure all her coders are cross-trained to be able to do each other's jobs, and she also subscribes them to six newsletters.

If your office bills for the same procedures on a regular basis, training will be easier, notes **Ann Stethens**, office manager with **John M. Vasil Family Practice** in Northern Cambria, PA. And having someone in-house who can provide coding training to interested employees is also helpful.

"If you have a good employee, that's half the battle," says consultant **Phyllis Yingling** with **Apple A Day** in Hilton Head, SC. If someone in your practice is "already coming to work and already a responsible employee, you're far better off using that person and helping [him] get certified.

Otherwise, says Yingling, you could pay "big bucks" to train a new employee without knowing if they're really worth the investment.

Office experience is a plus: Chances are if an employee has already been working in your office as a receptionist or scheduler, she already knows some of the terminology you use regularly, adds Yingling. So training is just a matter of sitting down with her and going through the CPT Codes book to teach her how to use it. If you want your coder certified, you'll have to put in more work - sending her to seminars and helping her prepare for the coding exam.

"A background in health information and scheduling" will allow an employee to train more quickly as a coder, says Shepherd. Previous work experience in the office means the trainee already knows the process "from start to finish," she adds. And if someone already has experience in the chart room and has handled scheduling, he or she will understand how to perform quality assurance on a chart, procedure report or evaluation and management visit.