

Part B Insider (Multispecialty) Coding Alert

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION: Want Your Coders To Stick Around? Show Your Appreciation

But don't pay them more based on upcoding

A good coder is a wonderful resource and a treasure forever. But keeping your coding experts happy so they'll stay with you for a long time requires more than just the occasional pat on the back, say experts.

Retaining some of your most valuable employees takes some attentiveness and forethought. Here are some expert tips to keep coders from taking a hike:

1. Show your appreciation.

Virginia Shepherd, office manager with **Utah Digestive Health Institute** in Ogden, UT, takes her coders to lunch both individually and as a team. "I make sure to write them a note for something they have done to help the team be successful," she adds.

2. Reward them for improved collections-but not on a percentage basis

Shepherd gives her coders a raise if they make improvements to a billing process that lead to increased collections. She also rewards schedulers who collect information up-front that makes the billing process smoother. "This encourages the scheduling team, by peer recognition, to go the extra mile."

But "you can't pay [coders] based on what they coded," cautions consultant **Phyllis Yingling** with **Apple A Day** in Hilton Head, SC. If you provide bonuses or raises for coders based on the extra money they bill, you're giving them an incentive to upcode, and that could spell trouble with the feds.

3. Don't wait until they're already looking at other offers.

If someone else offers your coder more money, you've already lost, says Yingling. By that time, she's already started putting her resume out there, so even if you match the salary another office offers, you're only dooming yourself to an ongoing game of one-upmanship.

4. Listen to suggestions.

Your coders may have ideas for changes that will help benefit the whole team, and also keep them happy in their jobs, Shepherd explains.