

Home Health ICD-9/ICD-10 Alert

Coding Tools: Hire a Credentialed Coder and Limit Denials to 5% of Claims

Hiring coders may be all the rage, but don't start sifting through resumes without this key information

If you're convinced your agency needs a "designated coder" to ensure coding accuracy and proper fiscal-intermediary reimbursement, you need to know which credentials will best suit your agency's needs before you offer a candidate the position.

Pros of Hiring a Coding Ace: Adding a designated coder to your agency's staff will increase your coding consistency and minimize the amount of training you need to educate clinicians on proper home health coding standards, says **Prinny Rose Abraham, RHIT, CPHQ**, a home health coding expert with Minneapolis-based HIQM Consulting. When a clinician does the coding, your consistency is compromised, you have to arrange for coding training, and you often have to designate a person to supervise clinician coding anyway, Abraham says.

Depending on your agency's specific needs, you should narrow your pool of candidates based on their credentials. Here are six prominent coding certifications you might run across:

1. CCA -- The American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) offers the "Certified Coding Associate" certification as "an entry-level coding credential based on job analysis standards" for individuals beginning a new career as a coder.
2. CCS -- AHIMA's "Certified Coding Specialist" certification represents "mastery in clinical coding." Candidates with these credentials will have expertise in ICD-9 coding and some CPT coding, and can classify medical data from hospital records on both the inpatient and outpatient sides.
3. RHIA/RHIT -- AHIMA's "Registered Health Information Administrator" and "Registered Health Information Technician" certifications focus on health information management skills with general CPT, ICD-9 and HCPCS proficiency.
4. CPC -- The American Academy of Professional Coders offers these credentials. Candidates with CPCs will have at least two years coding experience and expertise in using the CPT, HCPCS and ICD-9-CM manuals, but mostly for coding for physician services.
5. HCS-D -- The Board of Advanced Medical Coding offers this "Homecare Coding Specialist" certification to individuals skilled in home health diagnosis coding, and clinical and billing staff management.

If you plan on hiring a coding professional, it's better to start your search now because, according to Abraham, finding and hiring these top commodities may not be an easy task.