

# After Automated Coding, What?

Save to myBoK

---

*As technology progressively automates more processes, what will HIM jobs look like in the future? In 1998, AHIMA published *Evolving HIM Careers*, which offers in-depth looks at seven new roles for HIM professionals, including the role of the clinical data specialist. Here are some excerpts that may provide an answer to the question, "After automated coding, what?"*

---

Computer-based health records, electronic data-handling systems, and standardized clinical terminologies are being developed and implemented in healthcare organizations across the United States. Universal adoption of automated health information systems is all but certain some time during the next decade. From that point on, the key to success (and perhaps even survival) for healthcare organizations of all kinds will be ready access to accurate, uniform clinical data. Eventually, detailed, reliable, and comparable clinical data will make possible real and lasting improvements in quality of care, treatment outcomes, and cost control ...

The clinical data specialist will play an important role in ensuring the availability and relevance of this invaluable resource as well as in converting data into truly useful information. In some cutting-edge healthcare enterprises, clinical data specialists have already begun to take on this role as they mine data from diverse information sources and internal databases. Now and in the future, they will occupy an ideal vantage point to know what data exists, where to find it, and how to interpret it ...

In the future, as information management functions are combined and reorganized, clinical data specialists will report in at a number of levels within healthcare organizations. Official titles will depend on the professional's level of responsibilities. The specialists will work in an even wider variety of healthcare settings ...

To perform effectively, the clinical data specialist working in an organization or integrated system with a totally automated health information system will continue to need professional skills in information management and expertise in using the classification systems that are relevant to the types of services the facility provides. In addition, he or she will need to understand current reimbursement methodologies and basic statistics.

A requirement for proficiency in the use of the healthcare applications of computers will be a given, especially a full understanding of the flow of information in automated health record systems. He or she should also be able to apply the principles of clinical research and follow the steps in the development of clinical protocols. To work on materials for administrative decision making, the clinical data specialist will need a working knowledge of the local and national healthcare markets and marketing fundamentals. When training is to be a part of his or her position's functions, an understanding of adult learning techniques will be required. Managers will always need human resource management skills as well as budgeting and planning fundamentals ...

The role of the coder will evolve from coding and abstracting health records to auditing codes in various repositories and registries. Using encoders and other electronic tools, the coder will validate the codes generated at the point of care by reviewing the electronic data and suggesting clarifications, revisions, and additional information as necessary to fully describe each episode of care.

The clinical data specialist's role in converting data into information for decision making will continue to expand. He or she will analyze clinical data, interpret the information gleaned from the data, and then display and present data in ways that are useful to decision makers throughout the organization. The information digested from health records in the future will be used, as it is today, in both clinical and operational applications ...

A clinical data specialist's responsibilities might include:

- designing and using audit tools to monitor the accuracy of clinical coding

- monitoring compliance with policies and procedures relevant to clinical data management and making suggestions for improvements
- interpreting data for reimbursement applications
- validating data for various disease registries
- preparing utilization analyses
- preparing provider profiles
- collecting and analyzing data for special clinical research projects

The era of information-based decision making in healthcare has already begun. Maintaining the quality and availability of accurate, comparable, and reliable data and understanding how to turn huge amounts of undigested data into meaningful information will continue to require the skills and experience of health information management professionals.

Evolving HIM Careers is available in the [FORE Library: HIM Body of Knowledge](#).

---

**Article Citation:**

"After Automated Coding, What?" *Journal of AHIMA* 70, no. 7 (1999): 43.

---

Driving the Power of Knowledge

Copyright 2022 by The American Health Information Management Association. All Rights Reserved.