

# Coder Uses Education as a Pathway to Success

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*by Jewelle Hicks, newsletter editor*

For coding consultant Bonnie C. Sher, RHIA, CCS, CCS-P, CPC, her entrance into the world of HIM began with the desire to secure a future for herself and her family. In 1990 she was shocked when a friend's husband suddenly died, leaving the family with no means of support. Sher knew that by pursuing her education she would have the job skills and foundation to support herself and her family through any situation.

She took an aptitude test at the Metropolitan Junior College of Kansas and the results indicated strengths in library science and medicine. Encouraged by her test results and a member of her church who was a program director at Metropolitan, Sher decided to continue her education and pursue a career in HIM. "HIM gave me the skills to be confident. I had a career that could not be phased out," Sher says.

## Making Education a Priority

After working as a discharge analyst at Baptist Medical Center in Kansas City, MO, Sher developed an interest in coding and quickly realized that education was the key to advancing in the HIM profession. "At this point I knew I needed a four-year degree as well as a coding certificate," she says. After taking a coding job in Kansas City, Sher was encouraged by her supervisor to obtain her coding certificate.

Sher received her CCS-P and CPC certifications while enrolled at Stevens College's distance learning program in Columbia, MO, and discovered a love of education that continues to this day. "All the education I've received has led to a new opportunity for growth," she notes.

After receiving her coding credentials, Sher revisited her goal of pursuing a four-year degree as the next stage in her professional growth. When her husband received a job offer in Arkansas, Sher quickly agreed to the move with the knowledge that she could continue her studies through distance learning.

## On the Road to a Lifelong Adventure

She enrolled in the HIM program at Arkansas Technical University and formed a bond with the university's program director, Melinda Wilkins, MEd, RHIA, who encouraged her to work part time while attending classes and even recommended her for a part-time coding consultant position. When the company was later acquired by a larger organization, Sher received and accepted the offer of her current position as a coding consultant.

Sher earned her RHIA in 2001 and describes her education as a "step-by-step growth process. Every piece of the puzzle has led to something else." Sher says she is a huge proponent of education: "It is the best investment you can make in yourself." She acknowledges that it can be a challenge to continue an education while working full time and raising a family, "but it's worth it. Educate yourself as much and as often as you can," she advises.

This self-described "education junkie" has professional obstacles, namely finding the time to learn more about the specialized aspects of the profession. Sher overcomes this by being selective in her readings in order to "accomplish as much as I can without spinning my wheels," she says. She notes that the Communities of Practice are "wonderful" as a resource for staying current on trends and information in the field.

Despite a successful career, Sher continues to look to broaden her knowledge base. She wants to earn her master's degree or a new privacy certification. When reflecting on her career, Sher says, "I began just trying to make sure I could support myself and my family and ended up on a lifelong adventure of learning."

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