

Combating our Fear of Change and Creating a Holistic Approach to HIM Education [Sponsored article]

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Knowledge is at the core of everything we do. It is behind the mechanics and strategy of coding and the ease of understanding the final outcome(s), and it plays an integral part in the acceptance of change when faced with industry-wide transformation.

Last year, the health information management (HIM) world braced for the “Coding Apocalypse,” or the ICD-10 transition, fearing a lack of the proper knowledge to safely emerge from the tangle of conversion. Many healthcare employees, from all backgrounds and levels, partook in hours of preparation and education to ensure that they were ready for the new code set and life after ICD-9. Others chose to walk away from their careers, fearing they simply could not adapt to this new system. Private practice providers decided to fold or found safety in merging with other providers.

The fear and anxiety that grew in our industry over the ICD-10 transition was contagious; it spread across the United States, forcing organizations to react rather than strategically prepare. It is interesting how we react to change, especially of this magnitude. Our frenzied reaction may have not been necessary had we taken a step back to evaluate our current knowledge to determine the best approach.

For many, HIM knowledge begins with higher education programs that provide a breadth of information to prepare students for future change. At the core of every curriculum, accredited institutions focus on understanding the “how” and “why” of coding. Students learn the underlying detail of each specialty to appropriately assign codes or properly query a physician’s documentation notes. Classes on anatomy and physiology are critical in preparing an HIM professional for ICD-10 coding, in order to assist with the granular specificity of the code set. Many programs require students to round out their education with an internship to gain on-the-job training and apply their knowledge to real-life situations.

With the knowledge that HIM professionals gain from accredited institutions and organizations, they have learned what is at the core of coding and what outcomes should be, regardless of the coding system they’re working in. Our professionals are already equipped with the proper foundation to understand the underlying function of coding; the next step is to continue their education with specific training to avoid another frenzied approach to future change.

Our biggest challenge continues to involve obtaining the level of detailed required from providers to accurately assign codes and paint a clear picture of the care provided, or how sick the patient is. Establishing relationships and on-site interactions with providers has never been more important to hone our ability to clearly communicate in a thoughtful, respectable, and intelligent manner.

How do we elevate our education and knowledge to create a more holistic approach and better prepare for future change? A well-rounded educational approach should include the areas previously discussed, but to truly build an understanding of our environment, HIM professionals should not resist or be afraid of change. We should begin to embrace emerging technologies and coding systems that will aid in elevating our productivity. Leveraging healthcare technology to achieve a high level of efficiency and accuracy is a must in today’s world. Further, it’s imperative that we engage with colleagues of varied backgrounds and expertise to gain a better understanding of how the ever-changing spectrum of healthcare affects more than just the coding world. Willingness to share our knowledge and challenges with others in the healthcare realm will allow us to understand the challenges that others face and, in turn, give better understanding as to how to better assist them.

Sometimes we get so caught up in our resistance to change that we don’t see that we already have the tools to be successful. We often hear that “the only thing that is constant is change.” In an ever-evolving healthcare world, we have to be confident in our knowledge, and our professionals, to become comfortable with change. Together we can continue to educate one another and grow the HIM community to its full potential.

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