

Converging Roads of HIM and Managed Care

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compiled by AHIMA's Managed Care Task Force

The authors explore the definition of managed care and how the health information manager's skills apply to a managed care setting. In addition, HIM professionals who have made the transition to the managed care setting share their experiences.

What is managed care—and what opportunities exist for HIM within managed care?

A very basic definition of managed care is a system "organizing healthcare providers and coordinating patient care in order to improve quality and lower costs."¹ Assuming this definition is accurate, it becomes easier to view the role of the HIM professional in the managed care arena.

It has been said that managed care organizations do not manage care per se, but direct care to acute settings that offer the necessary or requested quality services at an agreed-upon reimbursement rate or redirect care to an alternative setting. *The Managed Care Resource* defines managed care as "a system of health care delivery that influences utilization of services and cost of services and measures performance. The goal is a system that delivers value by giving people access to quality, cost-effective health care."²

Managed care has its own healthcare industry dialect—its own set of acronyms, governmental agencies, rules and regulations (both state and federal), and external accrediting bodies. Its vernacular, in fact, encompasses the entire healthcare delivery system. And the vernacular extends to the HIM vocabulary as well. It appears now that the managed care arena is the continuum of healthcare, or the directing or redirecting of healthcare services from birth to death. In this arena, HIM professionals are naturals for management and organization positions—quality, utilization and case management, provider relations, and others.

Managed care offers a wealth of challenges to HIM professionals in all settings. The accelerated growth of managed care and the advent of capitated contracting with hospitals, integrated networks, and physicians have precipitated this rapid growth. Different parts of the country, however, are experiencing different levels of managed care penetration and provider integration at different rates. For example, California (46 percent) and Oregon (43 percent) are achieving the highest penetration rates, while states like Alaska (0 percent) and Wyoming (2 percent) are much lower.³ Though market penetration varies, the opportunities are certainly there for those who seek them.

Working in managed care does not require additional skill sets. It requires applying skills and abilities to processes and techniques that deliver and administer health services from a different perspective. From the perspective of a prepaid health insurance plan, a provider service organization, or a preferred provider organization, the desired outcomes are the same—quality healthcare delivery.

In this article, AHIMA's Managed Care Task Force presents the stories of three HIM professionals who made the transition to managed care. We asked them to describe the work they do, the HIM skills that help them make the transition to managed care, and their general perspective on their jobs. We hope that these examples of HIM professionals currently working in managed care will inform and inspire others who want to make a career transition into managed care.

[The IT Angle](#) by Carol Quinsey

[Reaching Operational Goals](#) By Sheila Green-Shook

A Clear Focus on Coding By Rhona Moses***Your Best Advantage***

In general, basic HIM skills and expertise can be transferred to the managed care environment, much the same as in any other delivery system. Operational and financial requirements vary depending on the kind of organization in question and specific job responsibilities. For example, skills like negotiating provider/network contracting, fees, or reimbursement schedules would likely be a skill acquired through previous work experience, contact with a mentor or coworker with managed care contracting experience, or a financial/accounting/business background. Data reporting requirements may vary from those found in more traditional settings, based on the diversity of the audience. Regulatory and compliance issues may also differ slightly.

There is immense potential for HIM professionals to take on different roles within managed care, but the specifics will be different in each case. If you are interested in working in managed care, you need to:

- be willing to identify and seize opportunities
- promote the skills and expertise of HIM professionals
- 'educate' the organization on the contributions of HIM professionals (through the ability to create and maintain positive working relationships both within the organization and with payers, providers, employers, and patient/customers)
- demonstrate innovative thinking that positively impacts the organization's goals
- identify methods of transferring basic HIM skills to the managed care environment
- seek out and network with people who have a managed care background, including appropriate professional organizations, to keep current on issues that have an impact on managed care
- surround yourself with individuals who are knowledgeable about the industry—those with proven track records, or those recommended by others within managed care as having a solid industry foundation
- use technology (such as the Internet) to assist you in researching current managed care issues
- enhance your understanding of how technology can advance or help automate the day-to-day operations of your managed care environment
- identify trade journals, textbooks, and other pertinent educational media (e.g., video, self-study programs) that will support your role within managed care

--Carolyn Valo, ART

AHIMA's Managed Care Task Force

Chair: Carolyn R. Valo, ART, senior product specialist, SMS

Diane K. Davis, RRA, senior provider contracts coordinator, Providence Health Plans

Mary K. Nespor, RRA, president and CEO, Educational Enterprises

Eileen J. O'Donnell, RRA, assistant vice president, government programs, Group Health Cooperative of Puget Sound

Josephine Sarti, RRA, administrator of medical records, UHP Healthcare

Matthew D. Schuller, RRA, quality improvement manager/director of operations, CCN/EPIQual Healthcare Program

Notes

1. Donato, Holly. "Managed Health Care: Standing Tall Under Scrutiny." Available at the United HealthCare home page. Go to <http://uhc.com/living/managed.html>.
2. United HealthCare Corp. *The Managed Care Resource*. Minnetonka, MN: United HealthCare, 1994.
3. "1997-98 Managed Care Profile Map: HMO Penetration Rates and Key Players." Available at Medical Data International Web site. Go to <http://www.medicaldata.com/MCMap/default.asp>.

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