

Creative Ways for Physicians to Prepare for ICD-10

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By Melanie Endicott

Let's be honest, there is a lot of angst amongst the physician community concerning the transition to ICD-10. The October 1, 2014 date is quickly approaching and if your practice has not begun preparing for the change, now is the time to get busy! Here are some fun ways to prepare for the transition that don't involve countless hours of mundane training.

Superbill Shakeup

Take a gander at your current superbill and focus on the ICD-9-CM diagnosis codes that are listed. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Are all of the diagnoses listed necessary for my practice?
- Are there key diagnoses missing?
- Why am I still using a paper superbill?
- Can this process of selecting diagnoses be integrated into the electronic health record (EHR) system that I am already using (or will soon be forced to use)?

After reviewing your superbill, select a stellar coding professional in your office to convert the ICD-9-CM codes to ICD-10-CM codes. If none of your coding staff have been trained on ICD-10-CM yet, now is the time to send one, some, or all of them to "countless hours of mundane training." There are a multitude of ICD-10 trainings being offered in various modalities, including online courses, workshops, and textbooks. Appropriate training for your coding staff will ensure a smooth transition and less chance of your staff pursuing new careers as pet food tasters or paper towel sniffers (these jobs really exist!).

Become a Tech Junkie

Since the government is forcing you to use an electronic health record, you might as well take advantage of all of its incredible features. Most EHRs have a coding feature built in, as well as electronic templates that can assist with the documentation nuances that ICD-10-CM has to offer. Make sure you check in with your EHR software vendor to guarantee that they are ready for ICD-10. They may even offer training for you and your staff on these new features.

Pull out your smartphone and browse through the numerous applications available for physicians and office staff on ICD-10. These apps may not be as fun as building words or matching candy pieces, but to the extreme coding geek (such as myself) these apps can provide hours of entertainment and education—and they really come in handy when you are quickly searching for a code or definition.

Deep Dive into Documentation

From a coding perspective, there may be some improvement opportunities for physician documentation in your facility. One way to determine if your documentation is ready for ICD-10 is to have one of your coders (preferably one who has attended that mundane ICD-10-CM training) begin coding a few charts each day in ICD-10-CM. This practice will quickly reveal any documentation gaps. Since ICD-10-CM consists of several new features that are not found in ICD-9-CM (such as laterality and episode of care), it is likely that some gaps in documentation will be identified. But have no fear, doing this analysis months in advance of implementation will allow for plenty of time to fill in those gaps and become documentation superstars.

Let's Make a Deal... to Communicate

Communication is the key to success for any project. As you are planning out your implementation plan for the transition to ICD-10, be sure that all physician office staff is aware of the transition timeline and what is expected of each individual along the way. And if you have no implementation plan yet, there is no more time to delay. Take advantage of the numerous resources available on the AHIMA and CMS websites and get that plan moving! You can communicate this plan, as well as throw in a little training, by creating posters, newsletters, tip sheets, documentation pocket cards for physicians, and e-mail updates.

What are you doing to prepare physicians for the ICD-10-CM/PCS transition? Have a success story? More ideas? Leave a comment below.

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