

Earning HIM Cred: the CHDA Credential

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by Mary Butler

As health information management (HIM) professionals find themselves constantly inundated with more data, they will need to update their skills to stay on top of it. And one of the best ways to do just that is by earning AHIMA's Certified Health Data Analyst (CHDA) credential.

The CHDA helps HIM professionals—or data analysts from other fields looking to break into healthcare—gain “the knowledge to acquire, manage, analyze, interpret, and transform data into accurate, consistent, and timely information, while balancing the ‘big picture’ strategic vision with day-to-day details,” according to [the program's overview](#).

For Jill Clark, MBA, RHIA, CHDA, who earned her CHDA credential about three years ago, the credential is instrumental in helping HIM professionals achieve information governance in their workplaces.

“Everyone’s talking about the data, whether it’s ICD-10 or meaningful use or clinical doc improvement, whatever the subject matter is, everyone is talking about the data. Collecting it, storing it, retaining it, analyzing it, and, more importantly, understanding how to ensure its integrity for the quality of patient care,” Clark says. “It’s an exciting time in our profession,” Clark says. “I would encourage them to consider a credential that does encompass domains which support information governance and the collection of data.”

Finding the CHDA's Value Add

Clark, who is a senior consultant at e4 Services, says she sought out the CHDA credential after she came to the conclusion that going back to school to get her doctorate was not feasible due to personal and professional obligations.

“I wanted to expand my skill set,” Clark says. “And since education wasn’t an option for me then, the other option was ‘what kind of credential can I get to highlight my skill sets beyond business and HIM?’”

The answer to that question was the CHDA credential. So far, getting the credential has paid off. Even though her current job as a senior consultant doesn’t put the expertise the credential gave her to use directly, it has opened doors and has afforded her opportunities she wasn’t offered before prior to earning the credential.

Since getting her CHDA, Clark says she’s been given the chance to do speaking engagements and teach college classes, opportunities she wasn’t anticipating.

“My goal in getting that credential was to polish off a skill set that I knew I enjoyed, an interest I had, but I didn’t expect the high volume of outreach I’ve gotten since obtaining the credential. And I’ve enjoyed that,” Clark says.

Clearing the Hurdles

The CHDA exam covers three domains: data reporting, data management and data analytics. For Clark, the data analytics domain was the biggest challenge since she hadn’t studied or used that skill in 10 years.

“It had been a while since I was the one that had to run the reports and validate the data. So that was a challenge for me but a good one. I needed that, given where the industry is going,” she notes.

And even though Clark successfully completed her RHIA and MBA, and all of the exams and coursework that accompany those achievements, she still had a lot of anxiety around taking the CHDA exam itself.

“As silly as it sounds, for me it was really challenging to think I have to schedule a time, go to a meeting room, sit in a cube, and take my test on a computer. That brought me a lot of anxiety. I had never done that before. I really teetered—do I really want to go through this?” Clark says.

For other anxious test-takers considering the CHDA or any other credential, Clark highly recommends talking to someone who knows exactly what the exam involves.

“Having somebody prepare me for that situation was very beneficial. I had talked to someone who’d taken the test in a test center, at a computer, and it comforted me to know that if I didn’t know the answer to the question I could skip it and go back to the question later, no big deal,” Clark explains.

The Present and Beyond

As a consultant, Clark’s day-to-day duties vary, but she spends a lot of time helping clients work through the ICD-10-CM/PCS conversion.

“However, obtaining the credential did allow me to tap into that skill set that I haven’t used in a while, and that skill set, specifically, analytics and statistics, has proved beneficial in my role with ICD-10 implementation because we’re talking about a change in data from one skill set to another. And the impact that change will have downstream within an organization,” Clark says.

And once ICD-10 is implemented, more and more highly detailed granular data will start flowing, giving rise to more opportunities for HIM professionals who can speak the language of data.

“We’re only going to continue to talk about data,” Clark says.

The implementation of ICD-10 is going to force healthcare organizations to have more conversations about their data and what to do with it.

“As we go into the home stretch of ICD-10, fingers crossed, these questions are starting to come up. How’s it going to impact my data analysis? How is it going to influence my forecasts? Quality measures are going to be publically available healthcare data. So it’s going to continue to be a topic of conversation beyond ICD-10.”

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