

Getting a Yes for PPE Placements

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By Chris Dimick

“No” is a common word heard by PPE coordinators.

Getting busy HIM professionals to host an HIM student for a professional practice experience can be a challenge. As important as the internships are in giving students real-world experience, PPE coordinators say it takes a mix of professionalism, emotion, and incentives to place students in today’s hectic work world.

Securing sites has become increasingly harder as more HIM departments face major health IT installations and reduced staffing, says Kathy Cliggett, MA, RHIA, an assistant professor and PPE coordinator at Gwynedd-Mercy College in Pennsylvania. HIM directors often feel stretched too thin to host a student, she says.

Other HIM professionals may be hesitant because they don’t know enough about the programs and responsibilities, says Stephanie Donovan, MBA, RHIA, assistant professor of HIM at Gwynedd-Mercy. “I think communicating realistic expectations to our clinical sites is one of the key components of them accepting students,” she says.

Gwynedd-Mercy holds an orientation with PPE site supervisors each year to discuss expectations of both the facility and the students.

Barb Glondys, RHIA, has placed PPE students for University of Illinois at Chicago for 13 years. She recommends that coordinators provide a detailed, organized list of the activities PPE students need to perform during their internship.

Planning the curriculum is the educator’s responsibility, not the HIM director’s, agrees Patricia Cunningham, RHIA, the senior director of revenue cycle operations at Rush-Copley Medical Center in Chicago. Cunningham has hosted PPE students every year since she became a director in 1991.

Appealing to Professional Responsibility

Placing students may require more than being organized. Another way to recruit HIM volunteers is to tug at their heartstrings, says Linda Galocy, RHIA, who coordinates PPE sites for Indiana University Northwest, based in Gary.

HIM directors were once eager students looking for a break. Now they are in a position to help a new generation. “They were all students at one point, and they all had to do clinical practice experiences, and staff took time out to work with them,” Galocy says. “I feel it is our professional responsibility to return the favor.”

Gwynedd-Mercy keeps track of their HIM program graduates, and routinely asks them to host PPE students.

“We say to [graduates], ‘We will be coming to you for clinicals,’” says Christine M. Staropoli, MS, RHIA, CCS, Gwynedd’s HIM program director. “I think they appreciate it then, they know what is involved. And they make the time because they understand that it is key for [a student’s] education to take that theory and actually apply it.”

Offering CE Carrots

In addition to feeling good about helping, PPE mentors can receive educational credit themselves. As a thank you to its PPE mentors, Indiana University Northwest hosts free educational sessions that qualify for continuing education credit. Mentors may transfer the classes to other staff, also.

At Gwynedd, college staff sometimes offer a trade to prospective PPE sites. “You take our students, we will come to your facility and offer free continuing education sessions,” Staropoli explains.

Tuition waivers are another carrot. For each Gwynedd student a site takes, PPE mentors receive a free tuition waiver for a three-credit class worth about \$1,800, Staropoli says.

In addition to offering AHIMA continuing education credits, Gwynedd also offers two additional CE credits and a thank-you banquet. One credit is for the PPE mentor, and the other can be given to a staffer who helped during the PPE visit, Cliggett says.

Do you have tips for getting a yes from prospective PPE sites? Ways to find the time to host a student, or experiences to share? Please share them below.

You can read more about the challenges—and rewards—of placing junior-year students in PPEs in the story [“Help Wanted”](#) in the September issue.

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