International Certificate in ICD-10 Coding: WHO-FIC, IFHRO Program Offers Standardized Training, Coder Recognition

Save to myBoK

by Kevin Heubusch, managing editor

ICD codes are used the world over. The circumstances for the coders who apply them, however, are by no means standard. Opportunities for education, professional development, and workplace recognition vary widely around the world.

That is changing this spring, as two organizations introduce standardized international training in mortality and morbidity coding using ICD-10. The first phase of the program, open to practicing coders who code underlying cause of death, offers the opportunity to earn an international certificate in ICD-10 mortality coding.

The program is a collaboration between the World Health Organization Family of International Classifications (WHO-FIC) Network and the International Federation of Health Records Organizations (IFHRO). IFHRO-which is holding its triennial congress and general assembly in Seoul, South Korea, this month-assists national associations and health record professionals in countries throughout the world in improving health information management.

Improving Quality, Recognizing Coders

The project began in the belief that training based on standard ICD-10 curricula will help improve the quality of mortality and morbidity data worldwide, explains Margaret Skurka, MS, RHIA, CCS. Certificates offer both an international benchmark for and a demonstration of coding competence. Coding professionals around the world can use the certificate to demonstrate their capability and assist them in gaining recognition for their work.

Skurka is professor and director of the Health Information Management Programs at Indiana University Northwest in Gary, IN. She also serves as a cochair of the WHO-FIC and IFHRO project. She came to that role, she explains, through her membership in IFHRO as AHIMA's representative to the organization.

Prior to her arrival, a subgroup had begun work by surveying WHO collaborating centers to gather information on ICD-10 training materials. It developed documents describing definitions, skill levels, and functions of coders and nosologists and distributed additional questionnaires on the needs of ICD-10 coders.

The group then created mortality and morbidity core curricula to evaluate the available training materials. Final curricula were approved by the WHO-FIC Network and IFHRO General Assembly in October 2004.

Skurka joined the work as the group began seeking materials, she relates, "So here came materials from Japan, from Sri Lanka, from Australia, Brazil, Canada…"

The group set about reviewing materials for both completeness of content and quality, divvying up the work among members according to language. The submissions revealed quality materials from around the world, Skurka says, and certainly more similarities than differences.

The group established processes for ensuring that educators and trainers met standards, and then began reaching out to practicing ICD-10 coders and potential trainers, Skurka says. The project also reaches out to employers, promoting the benefits of certified coding professionals, both as a way to improve coder status and encourage tuition assistance.

Funding for program support came from the US National Center for Health Statistics through a contract with AHIMA's Foundation of Research and Education.

The Certificate Process

The program offers multiple sources of training materials based on a modular approach, Skurka says. Materials are available in multiple languages, in several formats, and from sources including universities, public health organizations, health statistics agencies, and WHO collaborating centers. A Web-based program is in development.

Individuals wanting to become coders complete the core curriculum requirements, taught by a single recognized institution or trainer or obtained from multiple approved sources. Upon successful completion they are eligible for the certificate. Although different sets of training materials are available, all candidates take the same examination.

Practicing mortality coders who code underlying causes of death first complete a self-assessment that includes questions on their experience and coding's function and uses. They then complete an exam in which they assign codes to a series of sample death certificates and indicate the coding rules they have used. Those with an 80 percent pass rate receive the certificate.

A parallel process for morbidity coders will begin after IFHRO's Seoul meeting.

For more information on applying for the certificate or becoming a trainer, contact Sheryl Reyes, program assistant, at sheryl.reyes@ahima.org or (312) 233-1531.

Article citation:
Heubusch, Kevin. "An International Certificate in ICD-10 Coding: WHO-FIC, IFHRO Program Offers Standardized Training, Coder Recognition." *Journal of AHIMA* 78, no.5 (May 2007): 42.

Article citation:
Heubusch, Kevin. "International Certificate in ICD-10 Coding: WHO-FIC, IFHRO Program Offers Standardized Training, Coder Recognition" *Journal of AHIMA* 78, no.5 (May 2007): 42.

Driving the Power of Knowledge