

Joy of Teaching

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“When I was director of medical records, the part I seemed to like the most was the training of new employees,” says **Ellen Jacobs, MEd, RHIA**. Though Jacobs began her HIM career in a professional setting and is now an educator, it seems as though she’s been teaching all along.

After graduating from the University of Illinois, Jacobs worked in a practice setting for five years, where she found herself training staff with a class on medical terminology. She further indulged her interest in teaching by attending a two-week, government-funded teacher preparation workshop sponsored by the Association (then the American Medical Record Association). “I discovered this whole body of knowledge,” she says about the workshop.

Shortly after the program, Jacobs started teaching at the same program she graduated from. In 1980, she found herself ready for a move and made her way to Omaha, NE, where she is now the director of HIM programs at the College of Saint Mary.

“Going from the role of director of medical records to a faculty member was a big difference,” she says of the transition from practice to education. “As a teacher, all you’re responsible for is you and your classes.” No need to worry about filling in when HIM staff can’t come in to work, according to Jacobs. “You are responsible for you.” Jacobs also cites the frequent turnover of students as another positive side of education versus practice. As an educator, she notes, she is always working with new people.

There are some less desirable differences between being an educator and working in the practice setting, one of which is the fact that salaries for educators are often lower than in the professional setting. “You can’t be in it for the money,” says Jacobs. But “the benefits for me are that I love what I do,” she says. “I’m never bored.”

That’s one thing educators can’t be—bored. According to Jacobs, you have to like change and be open to new ideas. She also recommends getting a master’s degree if you want to teach. “The more education you have, the more broadly you can look at things,” she says.

According to Jacobs, HIM educators tend to have a closer relationship with their students than educators in other disciplines, mainly because they often have opportunities to interact when their former students are out in the field. “I think in our field you get to know your students pretty well,” she says. “I tell my students ‘you’re never done with me,’” she adds, laughing.

That’s the biggest reward for Jacobs—being able to see her students grow into HIM professionals. “That’s the joy of teaching—by the time they leave, they’re a peer, a professional,” she says.

—Jessica Squazzo

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