

Managing Audits Effectively: The Skills and Tools HIM Professionals Can Leverage to Manage the Various Audits

Save to myBoK

By Rita Bowen, MA, RHIA, CHPS, SSGB

Webster's Dictionary defines an audit as "a methodical examination and review." As a verb, it means "to examine with intent to verify." But to those of us working within healthcare provider organizations, an audit can seem like just another way to take away money.

More auditors and government contractors than ever before are actively trying to identify incorrect Medicare and Medicaid payments and potential fraud. Organizations must manage their workflows effectively and use available workflow technology to help keep track of the various audits and deadlines.

Auditing Essentials

Organizations should have a fully developed data plan or chain of responsibility regarding how audits are received and responded to. They should also fully plan for each type of audit request, because differences in review processes and response needs will vary according to who is making the request.

In December 2009 the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services modified the additional documentation request limits for the Recovery Audit Contractor program to every 45 days. But be warned: RACs may request approval from CMS to exceed this cap. For more information, e-mail RAC@cms.hhs.gov.

We must be aware of what is happening with audit requests because where one region focuses and finds potential, others will soon follow. We should also put our data analytic skills to use by performing coding reviews to mitigate threats from all auditing entities.

Data analytic skills are necessary to analyze internal and external audit findings. The results of our reviews can assist organizational training on how to fix broken processes that represent a potential risk to its financial well being.

HIM professionals should consider becoming a Certified Health Data Analyst because the demand for this skill set will continue to grow. Auditing groups have already hired staff with analytic skills because they know exactly where to find the largest bang for their buck.

Showcasing Our Skills

We must manage these efforts and ensure compliance and revenue integrity. Failure to do so can affect an organization's ability to care for patients.

We must manage the audit process by:

- Managing ourselves during these stressful times
- Acquiring powerful teams and giving authority with responsibility
- Negotiating improvement opportunities
- Actively tracking, trending, and reporting
- Gauging factors affecting productivity
- Engaging leaders

We can change with the times and showcase our skills in the bargain. I recently read-and would encourage you to read- *Bounce: The Art of Turning Tough Times into Triumph* by Keith McFarland. It is an insightful book that serves as an excellent guide for leadership during stressful times.

After my husband and I lost our first home to a fire, my dad gave us a “super ball.” I was puzzled by this gift until he explained that it was a reminder that the harder we are hit, the higher we will bounce back.

So, add a super ball to your toolbox, and it will remind you that no matter how hard you get hit you can always bounce back higher.

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