

New Languages of Medicine: Inform and Influence Now

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Many healthcare decision makers do not understand the many ways coded data are used throughout healthcare and the urgency of moving forward with ICD-10. They also are unable to visualize how reference terminologies such as SNOMED CT are used in electronic health record systems and how these terminologies relate to code sets. Health information management professionals need to arm themselves with this knowledge so they can inform their organizations and lead planning efforts.

Improving Current Practice

HIM professionals have been responsible for coding diagnoses and procedures for clinical research, case and provider indexing, and public health and health policy since the 1930s. Code-based payment now dominates the industry's attention, and while the historical uses continue to be important, the pressures of consistent and accurate coding and revenue cycle management are central concerns for all healthcare organizations.

In “Coder Education: Will Demand, Will Deliver” we hear from experts about the three-pronged challenges of coding today: effective documentation, skilled coders, and code sets that reflect current medical knowledge and technology.

Our thanks to the team from the University of California, Davis for sharing a best practice in “Verbal Orders Compliance and How We Achieved It.” Authentication for verbal orders is governed by state law and accreditation standards, and compliance can require expensive audit processes. This case study demonstrates compliance achieved by “persistence, teamwork, and imagination.”

A New Era of Data Management

Jack Bowie gives an overview of SNOMED CT in “Four Options for Implementing SNOMED.” He advises HIM professionals to understand how advanced terminologies are used in electronic health records and their relationship to code sets such as ICD and CPT. Visit the National Library of Medicine Web site to view the new UMLS site where vocabulary tools are available at no charge (www.nlm.nih.gov/research/umls).

We are at the frontier of a new era in healthcare data management—and it is sorely needed. Current data management policy and practices are not serving us well in the US despite the best efforts of HIM professionals to adhere to high standards for coding.

ICD-9 is a 30-year-old classification system that no longer accurately describes today's practice of medicine. It must be replaced by ICD-10. We can't continue to allow payer-specific policy to distort the integrity of data. And we must move new data management technologies such as computer-mapping logic, artificial intelligence, and computer-assist-ed coding tools from research laboratories into operation. These tools will enable us to capture, store, and retrieve facts to achieve more effective patient care and more effective health policy. And they will create many interesting new jobs for HIM.

AHIMA is working on your behalf with national decision makers to advocate for needed changes in policy and regulations and to properly place terminologies and code sets in the blueprint for health information improvements. AHIMA is also preparing a variety of learning tools for you and your organizations. As in other areas of HIM practice, the coding domain is expanding and changing in major ways. Check the AHIMA Web site and the online FORE Library: HIM Body of Knowledge for resources on ICD-10 and SNOMED. Participate in audio seminars and new online course work. Learn from your peers in the Communities of Practice. Become informed and then inform and influence others.

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Driving the Power of Knowledge

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