

# No Uncertain Terms

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by Anne Zender

HIM professionals think of classification systems such as ICD-9-CM as tools for everyday use. But these familiar systems are evolving and changing rapidly—as Donna Pickett, RRA, is well aware.

Pickett is medical systems administrator for the Office of Data Standards, Program Development, and Extramural Programs at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) in Hyattsville, MD. The NCHS, an agency of the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), collects, analyzes, and disseminates statistical information on the health of Americans. Within this organization, Pickett is technical director for morbidity classification activities. She plans, develops, and carries out activities related to the maintenance and update of the diagnosis portion of International Classification of Diseases (ICD-9-CM) and the development of the newest revision, ICD-10-CM (for which a definite implementation date has not yet been established in the US), and the International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities, and Handicaps (ICIDH-2). Pickett also works closely with other organizations and individuals interested in morbidity information and data collection.

## Expanding Horizons

Her role requires her to be acutely perceptive of how classification systems like ICD-9-CM are being used and of the needs of the classification's users. Updating these systems, she says, is both a challenging and rewarding process. "One of the reasons we are looking to ICD-10-CM as a replacement for ICD-9-CM is that ICD-9-CM is stretched to capacity," she says. "There are many new concepts that we don't have the room to include in ICD-9-CM, so it's a great opportunity to include them in ICD-10-CM. It's rewarding to include new concepts that are important to users, but it's a challenge to do so while remaining consistent with the ICD structure and conventions."

Pickett's 25 years of experience as an HIM professional have well prepared her to meet such a challenge. Prior to joining NCHS, she was director of the American Hospital Association's (AHA) central office on ICD-9-CM, serving as editor of the *Coding Clinic for ICD-9-CM* newsletter and managing the ICD-9-CM clearinghouse. She also has been senior director for corporate reimbursement planning at the New York City Health and Hospitals Corp., where her activities included coordinating reimbursement appeals, overseeing the system's information and billing database, and monitoring case mix analysis and data quality.

## A Matter of Influence

Her broad range of experience allows Pickett to witness the appearance of new opportunities for HIM professionals related to the development of clinical vocabularies and terminologies in conjunction with the evolution of the electronic medical record (EMR). "HIM professionals will have a lot of opportunities to be part of efforts that influence development of the EMR, particularly in the area of data set and clinical vocabulary standardization that will be needed," she says.

There is also a need for a more granular code set or nomenclature to be used with the EMR, she notes. "HIM professionals are in a great position to be part of that development and implementation process," Pickett says. "They understand the clinical record and its multiple users and uses, which would be key in the development of the EMR. HIM professionals need to make sure they are part of the decision-making process in automating any parts of the medical record."

As HIM professionals are asked to help address issues in classification—and other areas of healthcare—those who lead the way must keep their knowledge current. Reading and networking are Pickett's two best sources of professional development, she says, but she also finds the Web a useful resource. Among her favorite sites is one that includes information on the administrative simplification provisions of the 1996 Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (<http://aspe.os.dhhs.gov/adminsimp/>). She also likes to follow classification activities abroad: "The information may not be

directly applicable, but it enhances an HIM understanding to see how others are resolving issues similar to ours," she says. One recommended site is the home page of Australia's National Centre for Classification in Health, located at <http://www.cchs.usyd.edu.au/NCCH/ncch.html>.

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