

Passion for Coding

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by Meg Featheringham, assistant editor

Tanai Nelson, CCS, CCS-P, always knew that she wanted to go into some branch of the medical field. “I always thought I was to going to be a nurse at first,” she says. “I’ve always been intrigued about medicine, how things work, and learning about the body. Coding was just a perfect fit for me.” Nelson, a medical record technician, finds comfort in the details of coding. “It allows me to be nitpicky,” she says. “It’s like trying to do a jigsaw puzzle and putting all the pieces together and figuring it out.”

Getting the Broad View

Nelson began her HIM education as a student at the University of Illinois Chicago. She put her career on hold when she became pregnant with her first child. But she continued with her education. “I went back to school after being married and having children. It was hard, but I was very dedicated,” she says of her education. “I put in many long hours of independent studying.”

She then earned her CCS-P and CCS credentials and landed her first job in billing at Northwestern Memorial Home Health Care. She moved to billing and collections at a physician’s office. It was there she got a complete overview of the revenue cycle. “I acquired most of my experience from being in the doctor’s office because there’s not as many people and because I pretty much did the process from beginning to end,” she says. “Everything really relies on you more when you’re in a smaller setting like the doctor’s office.”

The experience she gained from the physician’s office would eventually help her as she moved into a coding position at an acute care facility. “By doing billing first and then emphasizing on coding, I believe it gave me a step up because I know what’s needed and what’s looked for. And if you can get things done on the front end, I know how much that saves somebody on the back.”

Eventually she landed in her current position at Loyola University in Chicago, where she assigns diagnosis and procedure codes for the ambulatory surgical center, 23-hour observation stays, periodically inpatient stays, and emergency room visits.

Sharing the Wealth

Nelson is passionate about her career in coding. “I really love coding,” she says. “It’s amazing to do something that you can really have a passion for and get fulfillment out of because it’s very important. Coding is such an important part of the medical field.”

Her zest for coding is now translated into facilitating two of AHIMA’s Communities of Practice (CoPs), Coding for Physician Practice and OPPS. “It’s been a really great experience for me because it’s given me the opportunity to feel involved in my field, more than just a job,” she says. Nelson enjoys getting to know her fellow coders through the CoPs. “I get to network with so many people all over the 50 states. It’s really great because I give them something and I learn just as much as I give. I talk to some of the people so much, every day, it’s like we’re friends.”

Nelson keeps up with the volume of HIM news through e-mail, e-newsletters, and some old-fashioned research of her own. “I just try to soak up as much information as I can because there’s so much information and there’s no way to possibly have it all,” she says. “But I always want to be on top of things. I always want to be the person who knew to tell the other people.”

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