

Get Coded

Early this year, our practice made the executive decision to take our compliance commitment to a higher level. It does not take rocket science to figure out that in the current health care environment, payors are looking for creative ways to decrease cost or enhance revenues. Unfortunately for providers, the revenue enhancement is coming in the form of audits. As a result, we wanted to ensure our billing staff thoroughly understood coding in order to identify coding and/or documentation issues.

This led us to the decision that every member of our billing staff would be required to sit for the national Certified Professional Coding Exam in Dermatology (CPCD). As you can imagine, this caused some panic among the department. However, an organization cannot set such a high expectation without providing the team with resources to help them be successful with the exam.

Here are some of the tools that we deployed: The company paid for every billing employee to be members of the AAPC. Membership is required in order to sit for the CPCD. We then had every member of the department sit for the practice exam so we could gauge their understanding of applying coding guidelines to actual documentation. We made sure that each employee sat for the practice exam in a controlled environment with the clock running so we could provide feedback on the time element.

The practice exam provided a number of trends and surprises across the department. The most common trends included: the clock is not your friend, it took every employee much longer to complete than the exam would afford, evaluation and management guidelines were widely confusing and lacking from our staff standpoint, and the most common surprise after the team got past the shock of taking the practice exam is that **they knew more than they realized**. So the preparation for the exam was launched.

Our training process

As a former certified trainer, I prepared a number of "classes" that we would go over during lunch and learn initiatives. (Yes, we even ordered lunch for our team because we wanted everyone to understand how important the exercise meant to the practice). Each week for approximately five weeks we covered different topics. We spent the most time going over the 1995 and 1997 evaluation and management guidelines and the most significant differences between the two.

We encouraged staff to attend local coding workshops, and at least once we allowed staff to attend a program covering E/M during work hours.

We paid for every employee's study guide. While most of my team found the study guide helpful, the examples are not as complex as what you will experience in the testing environment, and staff frequently asked for more complex examples.

We paid for everyone's exam fees regardless if they passed or failed. We did not want our staff to incur cost as a result of their learning process.

Most of the team sat for the exam initially, and we had several employees that successfully passed the exam. For those that were not successful on the first round, they now understood the complexity of the exam, and they are more committed to studying outside the office using the resources provided while looking for online tools to assist them.

For anyone looking to sit for the exam, on Friday, March 1 at the Annual Meeting, I would highly suggest having at least two years experience. The exam is tough, and having a clear understanding of all services provided by a dermatologist is important.offers a bootcamp in the morning geared toward the exam and taught by the AAPC. I believe taking the national exam is commendable as it helps demonstrate your expertise and provides creditability to your practice.

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Tags: ICD-10, member benefit