# Staff engagement in the remote setting

As part of the twelfth annual Clinical Documentation Integrity Week, ACDIS conducted a series of interviews with CDI professionals on a variety of emerging industry topics. **Jeanne Johnson, RN, BSN, MHA, INF,** director of clinical documentation at Premier Health in Dayton, Ohio, answered these questions. She is a member of the Ohio ACDIS local chapter and of the 2022 ACDIS Furthering Education Committee. For questions about the committee or the Q&A, contact ACDIS Associate Editor Jess Fluegel (*jfluegel@acdis.org*).
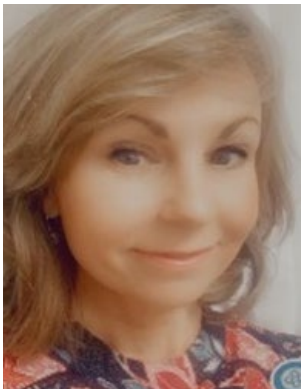
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Q **According to the survey results, only 13.43% of respondents were 100% remote prior to the pandemic, but during the pandemic the percentage jumped to 77.68%. Currently, 61.90% are still 100% remote and another 32.15% said they have a hybrid program of some sort, leaving less than 6% as fully on-site. Are you still remote? If a CDI program wants to move to remote work, what do they need to consider? Are there any policies or procedures that make this structure successful?**

A That is a great question. We initially went remote during the COVID surge and then transitioned to a hybrid program. While we were hybrid, we continued post-review and real-time audits that allowed us to watch for missed opportunities and provide education for the team. During this time, we also used our ACDIS resources and found a templated policy for working hybrid or remote. We used that to develop our own policy.

The team did amazingly well and wanted to be fully remote. We did make the move to a fully remote team about six months ago. We have gotten creative with staff meetings, education sessions, and touch points to make them fun and interactive even though we are not physically together on a daily basis.

Q **More than 33% of respondents said their staff engagement has actually increased since moving to a remote structure, and nearly 52% said their engagement has remained the same. For the roughly 15% who said their engagement decreased, what methods or activities do you suggest to help increase staff engagement?**

A I feel the office environment allowed those working together to get real-time answers to their questions. In the remote environment, it may be a little delayed. The leaders within my team have done a great job at ensuring they are accessible to everyone each day. We do use email quite a bit for questions and also send a quick message if there is something that needs urgent attention. To keep engagement high, each week the leaders have a touch point with their group. It may be via a staff meeting, an education session, or a team huddle, but that time allows everyone to connect. We also get together in person at least once each quarter and set aside a couple of hours for team building. This is a fun time that allows everyone to catch up with their peers while we eat good food and play games.

Q **Most 2022 CDI Week Industry Survey respondents (44.72%) said they entered CDI because they wanted to grow professionally and CDI offered them a chance to do so.**

What was your initial reason for entering CDI? What career growth opportunities have you had or seen since being involved in CDI?

A I was fortunate enough to start in CDI after my previous department was eliminated. I had no plans regarding the future but was so excited to learn about clinical documentation. With that said, I helped start the program at one of our community hospitals. That was a feat for sure as the providers were not accustomed to receiving queries or interacting with nurses regarding documentation. I soon became the team lead for that site and was then asked to become the manager of the entire integrative care team. This role had oversight for case managers, social workers, and the clinical documentation team. I fulfilled that role for a while and was then asked to assume the director of clinical documentation position for our system. That was also very exciting as the role was brand new and I felt like the work we do every day as CDI specialists was finally gaining exposure at the system level. I have currently been in this role since 2018 and love what I do.

Q We know from previous surveys that there's a high number of organizations currently hiring for CDI roles, yet nearly 70% of respondents to the CDI Week Industry Survey said they don't anticipate seeking out a new position at a different organization. Has your department recently hired staff? If folks aren't looking to change roles, where does this leave CDI departments that are actively recruiting?

A I am very thankful that we do not have a high turnover rate. When we do, it is typically due to someone having furthered their education and wanting to step into a leadership role. For CDI teams that are actively recruiting, I can tell you that I have never had the experience of hiring anyone with a working history of CDI. We have built a 12-week education program for all new hires that pairs them with a new CDI specialist each week. The managers have a touch point each week with them as well throughout the orientation period and beyond as we know this role is not easy and we are committed to everyone's success. With that said, my advice would be to build your own orientation program and utilize ACDIS Boot Camp resources as finances allow. It does require a lot of work, but the outcomes are always worth it!

Q Is there a relationship between the rate of new hires and the "new normal" effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, in your opinion? (In other words, with the country returning to normal, have CDI programs returned to normal, too?) Do you believe that the CDI industry fared better than some other healthcare-related fields in terms of maintaining program integrity (i.e., keeping staff employed and growing during the pandemic)? What are your own hopes related to CDI growth post-pandemic?

A While I cannot speak for other health systems, I do feel the leaders I connect with via the ACDIS CDI Leadership Council and Mastermind group have continued with strong CDI departments since COVID-19 appeared. My personal hope for the CDI team I lead is to receive approval for FTEs specifically around mortality reviews. We are currently building a process, and this will initially be managed by myself and two other leaders. As this looks quite different compared to our regular case reviews, I am hoping to prove to the executive suite how CDI can impact quality. This is not an area where we have been welcomed before, and I know we can make an impact!

Q The number one reported reason respondents said they would consider leaving their current role was management failure (91.27%), followed by lack of raises/low compensation (90.45%). When it comes to leaving the profession, the most impactful reason was burnout generally (52.19%), followed by required overtime (51.43%). What do you think these concerns say about the state of CDI? How can leaders protect against these risks?

A I am not surprised to see these listed as the top reasons for leaving a position. I think these likely impact every industry, and leaders need to understand this and be creative. In the world of healthcare, it is no secret that health systems are strained. Staffing is a big issue, as is revenue. As a leader, I did implement changes to provide my team with flexibility each day. I can't offer increases in salary, but I can offer them the ability to work from home, remove fear when needing to attend to an appointment during the day, not condone micromanaging, support them in their growth, and

maintain realistic goals. I have found that this always leads to good outcomes from engagement, productivity, and revenue.

Q **In your opinion, what risks do CDI programs face in not offering staff development opportunities? What advice would you give to an organization with limited resources seeking to provide some type of professional advancement or development opportunity to its staff? What advice would you give to CDI specialists seeking professional development opportunities in an organization that does not offer them?**

A I absolutely love this question as I have faced this issue. My objective is to create a career ladder within the CDI team. While this has not been approved, I am not losing sight of the goal and hope to revisit it next year. With that said, for those team members looking to grow, I do try and connect them with different committees that CDI supports. We do have some opportunity to participate in service line meetings and education, and we also support the readmission meetings by ensuring accurate coding of the case. Another easy way to continue to grow within CDI is listening to the ACDIS Podcast and joining your local ACDIS chapter. There is so much to learn about our profession, and ACDIS does a great job of bringing information to everyone. Do not forget there is always the opportunity to further your education. I have had the privilege to watch three of my CDI team members transition into other roles upon completing their master's degrees. CDI is a great area, and those who do leave it use the knowledge they have gained in future roles.

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Keep your remote CDI workforce engaged through stay interviews

A *global study by ADP Research Institute® in April 2022* revealed a stunning reluctance to return to the traditional pre-pandemic workplace. Of 32,000 workers surveyed from 17 countries, 64% said they would consider looking for a new job if required to return to an office full time.

Over the past two years, the workforce has experienced unprecedented change. In many cases, today's workers want different things from their jobs than before the pandemic. As their priorities shift, employees are taking action: An estimated one in five workers plan to quit their jobs in 2022, making talent retention a key priority.

The remote or hybrid work environment is here to stay and is poised to become even more prevalent in the future. Paradoxically, Gallup® reported in April 2022 that employee engagement is declining. Lack of in-person interactions with colleagues and leaders can create a loss of camaraderie and connectedness, ultimately resulting in disengagement from work.

What is one effective solution to this dilemma? Stay interviews. A **stay interview** is a highly effective tool that employers can use to retain CDI talent and promote engagement. It's not a new concept, but it has risen to prominence during the current Great Resignation. Think of it as the opposite of an exit interview.

A stay interview is an informal, friendly conversation that places the employee at its center. It's focused on the employee's motivation to remain with the organization, ways to improve their work experience, and how the organization can help fulfill their career ambitions. Done skillfully, these interviews can heighten employee engagement, strengthen relationships, increase loyalty, nurture a culture of excellence, and spotlight career development opportunities. They work best when held periodically throughout the year, instead of being tied to performance review season.

Here are some tips for conducting a stay interview:

- Send team members a few starter questions to prepare for the conversation ahead of time.

- Ask standard, structured questions using a conversational approach. Most stay interviews take less than half an hour.

- Create a sense of psychological safety that encourages free speech without fear of retaliation.

- Be prepared to listen and accept the feedback provided. It is critical to know what employees enjoy about their work and what could be better, including areas where you can improve as a leader.

With the insight a stay interview gives you about your team member and their motivation, it's time to take action. If you have easy fixes to particular issues, immediate action will send a clear message that you value the team member and will take steps to help them succeed. Examples include:

- Understanding your team member's preferred communication style

- Adjusting workload
- Recognizing the team member in a way that meets their language of appreciation

For an action item that requires more time, you can provide updates to let the team member know the item is on your radar.

CDI professionals and mid-revenue cycle solutions help you generate and preserve revenue

Stay interviews will go a long way toward creating a culture where people feel connected to one another in a changing and uncertain world. But should your CDI talent choose to leave, AMN Healthcare is the partner of choice in helping clients win the war for talent.

As one of the first providers of CDI staffing and services, AMN Healthcare Revenue Cycle Solutions offers qualified professionals and proven engagements for hospital inpatient, outpatient, clinic, and physician practice settings. Our solutions focus on enhancing documentation practices in all settings to accurately capture the patient's clinical picture and quality of care. Efficient documentation practices are intrinsically linked to targeted patient outcomes, heightened fiscal performance, high data quality, and appropriate reimbursement in focus areas, including risk adjustment, evaluation/management, population health management, denials, and NCDs/LCDs.

Our solutions are tailored to meet your goals and initiatives, whether your focus is financial, clinical, or operational. We identify documentation deficiencies, areas at risk for claim denials, and provide best practice benchmarking metrics. We partner with you to implement improvements which include optimizing workflow and review prioritization. We support sustaining success with post engagement mentoring and monitoring and providing content specific documentation integrity education. Projects may be conducted on-site or remotely depending on the facility setting, including provider practices, clinics, and hospital departments (e.g., ambulatory surgery, ancillary, observation, emergency departments, and more).

By partnering with you to implement the foundations of inpatient, outpatient, clinic, and physician practice CDI training and staffing solutions, you can ensure a long-term CDI program that improves revenue and quality capture, which safeguards the patient's story and improves the continuity of care within your patient population.

Additionally, our advisory solutions team can provide independent and unbiased assessments, identifying challenges, tailoring strategies, and highlighting areas of opportunity. We begin by analyzing your current state through a program assessment. Then, we work with you to develop clear plans for success, including proof of concept, pilot rollout, auditing, and staffing if needed, to provide a clear path to a future state that supports the achievement of your goals.

Learn how we can partner today to help you generate and preserve revenue, allowing you to provide a quality patient experience that is more human, effective, and achievable.

Visit AMNHealthcare.com/staffing/revenue-cycle/ for more information.

Sample stay interview questions:

What do you look forward to when you start your work each day?	What do you like most AND least about working here?	What keeps you working here?	What type of future do you see for yourself here?	If you could change something about your job, what would that be?
What would make your job more satisfying?	Tell me about your professional goals. What do you want to achieve?	How do you like to be recognized?	In your current role, which of your talents are you not using?	What skills would you like to learn/develop?
What motivates (or demotivates) you?	What can I do to best support you?	What can I do more of or less of as your leader?	What might tempt you to consider leaving?	How would you rate your level of engagement? (1 = low, 5 = high)