

Q&A

CDI WEEK

CDI and Career Advancement

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As part of the first Clinical Documentation Improvement Week, ACDIS has conducted a series of interviews with CDI professionals on a variety of emerging industry topics. *Wendy DeVreugd, RN, BSN, PHN, FNP, CCDS*, senior director of case management for Kindred Healthcare, answered the following questions from ACDIS regarding CDI and career advancement.

Q *The CDI profession seems to be a natural progression for nurses formerly involved with patient care or HIM professionals wanting to move beyond coding. Why is that?*

Experienced nurses, case managers, and coders/HIM professionals have been working in one way or another with patients, physicians, medical records, and various clinical conditions and treatment modalities for years. These experienced employees are looking for ways to leverage their skills and relationships in new ways.

Many facilities see that this developing job market and expanding CDI profession provides a competitive edge to hospitals who want to incorporate CDI programs as part of a comprehensive approach to quality, risk reduction, public reporting, and appropriate reimbursement in a shrinking pool of healthcare dollars. The expansion of the CDI field has called attention to the need for (and has proven it can ensure) a positive return on investment. Perhaps those seeking to advance their careers view these positions as more secure and rewarding; perhaps these individuals see this role as an opportunity to progress in business and educational skills, as well.

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Q *Many CDI departments are small, and the opportunity for promotion seems slim. How can CDI specialists “get noticed?”*

Creating a professional CDI specialist role identity involves many facets over a period of time. To get noticed, to promote the value of CDI, one must ask the question, “Why am I doing this CDI role?” They need to ask, “What is the value-added service my role brings to my hospital and physicians?”

To be successful, you need to have defined your own professional identity and be able to map that journey for others in order to raise awareness of the value of the CDI role. Once you have realized your own inherent value as a CDI specialist, you need to communicate that value to others within your organization. That may involve peer education regarding CDI efforts. It may mean you need to illustrate CDI outcomes (ROI, RAC take-back prevention, reduction in denials, increased physician knowledge). Communicating that value may require you to take proactive steps to market the value-added CDI services you provide, such as:

- ▶ Supporting the integrity of your facility’s medical records
- ▶ Appropriately receiving the right reimbursement for care
- ▶ Improved quality profiling and risk-adjusted mortality rate

Understanding and promoting the value of your CDI profession also means that you reach out to promote awareness of the CDI profession throughout the CDI community contacts. To get noticed and to advance your career, consider becoming involved with ACDIS. It is our supporting professional association, and doing so will provide you with valuable tools to help you network and grow your knowledge.

Q *What do you see as the next step or evolution in the CDI profession?*

A *I see a day when CDI specialists will not have to convince physicians and CEOs of the value of CDI.* But at this time, in many places, we still do. So what are the next important steps? How do we reach that plateau?

I believe finding ways to have partnerships with physicians and educating them on how CDI efforts actually help them in the long run—the “what’s in it for me” for the physician—will help promote compliance and gain specificity and integrity in clinical documentation.

To do that, early promotion of—and education about—documentation improvement efforts for physicians and nurses while they are still in school could be one important next step. By providing healthcare staff with education about how healthcare data is collected, aggregated, and ultimately used for reimbursement, quality reporting, and industry analysis, we could have some massive gains in CDI professional awareness. Hopefully more accurate clinical documentation will lead to a better knowledge of diseases and treatments nationwide. Perhaps this increased awareness

could even one day lead to a fairer allocation process of our ever-diminishing federal healthcare dollars. Or maybe I am being too idealistic.

But even with that said, as a CDI specialist I feel that the importance of what we do involves encouraging physicians to see the impact of their documentation on appropriate mortality and quality; to resolve the argument that one physician’s patients are sicker than another physician’s patients through appropriate documentation. We, as CDI specialists, are gaining an audience that is listening, and we need to stay focused, persistent, dedicated, and passionate on this subject of quality documentation as equal to quality patient care.

Q *What qualities do you look for in your CDI chart reviewers who might wish to become department managers?*

No. 1: An expert knowledge of coding guidelines/knowledge and a sense of expertise which the individual strives to maintain by an active passion for continuous learning. Other items that are absolutely necessary include:

- ▶ The ability to build and sustain relationships with others
- ▶ Effective communication skills that cover an approach to a variety of personalities
- ▶ Coaching and teaching ability
- ▶ An eye for detail
- ▶ Program management skills
- ▶ A good understanding of human capacity/resource skills

DeVreugd’s role covers the west group (West and Midwest regions, 12 states, 44 facilities) of the Kindred Healthcare LTAC hospital system. She is currently helping implement a clinical documentation improvement team across all its facilities. DeVreugd has 36 years of clinical nursing experience, including the areas of advanced clinical nursing practice, acute hospital management and strategic planning programs, quality management, risk management, infection control, acute and ambulatory care case management, managed care development and shared risk contract management, disease state management programs, and legal nurse consulting. She is a former member of the ACDIS advisory board. Contact her at wendy.devreugd@kindredhealthcare.com.