

HEALTH INFORMATION AND MEDICAL RECORDS TECHNICIANS

OCCUPATION DESCRIPTION

Compile, process, and maintain medical records of hospital and clinic patients in a manner consistent with medical, administrative, ethical, legal, and regulatory requirements of the health care system. Process, maintain, compile, and report patient information for health requirements and standards. They make sure that patients' initial medical charts are complete, all forms are completed and properly identified and signed, and that all necessary information is in the computer. They regularly communicate with physicians and other health care professionals to clarify diagnoses or to obtain additional information. Some medical records and health information technicians specialize in coding patients' medical information for insurance purposes. Technicians assign a code to each diagnosis and procedure. They consult classification manuals and also rely on their knowledge of disease processes. Technicians then use computer software to assign the patient to one of several hundred "diagnosis-related groups," or DRGs. The DRG determines the amount for which the hospital will be reimbursed if the patient is covered by Medicare or other insurance programs using the DRG system. Medical records and health information technicians' duties vary with the size of the facility where they work and work in pleasant and comfortable offices. This is one of the few health occupations in which there is little or no direct contact with patients. Because accuracy is essential in their jobs, technicians must pay close attention to detail. Experienced medical records and health information technicians usually advance by specializing or managing, particularly Medicare coding, or in cancer registry. Some schools offer certificates in coding as part of the associate degree program for health information technicians, although there are no formal degree programs in coding.

METHOD OF ENTRY

Occupations at this level generally require an associate degree. Completion of the degree program usually requires at least 2 years of full-time equivalent academic work. Health Information Technology programs have various levels where students may choose to leave the longer degree plan in favor of shorter certifications such as medical assistant or medical coder.

TRAINING

Medical records and health information technicians entering the field usually have an associate degree from a community or junior college. In addition to general education, coursework includes medical terminology, anatomy and physiology, legal aspects of health information, coding and abstraction of data, statistics, database management, quality improvement methods, and computer science. Most employers prefer to hire Registered Health Information Technicians (RHIT), who must pass a written examination offered by the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA). To take the examination, a person must graduate from a 2-year associate degree program accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Health Informatics and Information Management Education (CAHIIM). Additional certifications such as CCAS are available for medical coding.

EMPLOYMENT OUTLOOK

Average Hourly Wage 2007: \$14.74; Average Openings per year: 65