



2012

Occupational Gap Analysis Report

Medical Coders and Related Occupations

Produced by the Regional Employment
Board of Hampden County on behalf of the
Healthcare Workforce Partnership of
Western MA

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Occupational Gap Analysis Report

Medical Coders and Related Occupations

Overview

The Healthcare Workforce Partnership of Western Massachusetts is a collaboration between employers, workforce development, training and education providers who are dedicated to building a skilled healthcare workforce to deliver quality patient care. The Partnership responds to the workforce needs of employers and ensures that workers have access to the education and training needed to prepare them for lifelong careers in a rapidly changing industry. A complete list of partner organizations can be found in Appendix A.

In March 2012, employers identified several priority occupations for future research and career pathway development. They selected medical coding as a priority occupation due to changing industry requirements that impact the current and future workforce as well as identified gaps between the supply and demand of qualified coders.

Occupational Definition - Medical coders capture patient health information and use electronic medical records (EMR) technology to input, store, update, and retrieve information in a manner consistent with the healthcare industry's numerical coding system. The medical coder ensures a healthcare organization receives proper payment for services provided to patients.

The partnership's research and career pathway development process started with a formal gap analysis to better understand the medical coding occupation and to help define common career pathway elements linked with related occupations such as medical billing, medical office administration and health information technology.

Specifically the report highlights:

- Industry factors causing a dynamic shift in medical coding and other related occupations
- Regional supply and demand for current and future medical coders
- Identified skill and competency gaps existing in the current and future workforce
- Recommendations and next steps for regional career pathway development

This report summarizes the results of the gap analysis process and makes recommendations for next steps. The Partnership is using the US Department of Labor's *Career Pathway's Toolkit: Six Steps to Success* to guide the process. For more information about this resource please visit:

<https://learnwork.workforce3one.org/view/2001135442016073646>

This report was produced by the Regional Employment Board of Hampden County on behalf of the Healthcare Workforce Partnership of Western Massachusetts. For more information about the partnership or the report please contact: Kelly Aiken, Director of Healthcare Workforce Initiatives, kaiken@rebhc.org or 413.755.1369

Gap Analysis Methodology

The Partnership used a variety of methods to collect data, including:

- Partnership meetings with employer, education and workforce development representatives
- An online employer survey with 30 healthcare employers within the region responding
- Review of medical coding competencies provided by US Department of Labor and the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA)
- Review of career pathway promising practices
- Review of real time job postings
- Review of three community college and limited proprietary graduation data from medical billing and coding and medical office assistant certificate and associate degree programs

Industry Factors

State and federal healthcare reform efforts focus on improving the quality of patient care, reducing costs and improving overall population health. These efforts impact all aspects of the healthcare industry in western MA and create a changing landscape that makes future workforce planning necessary but also challenging as occupations evolve rapidly. Employers are increasingly aware of skill deficiencies and performance improvement opportunities for incumbent medical coders as well as new hires. Education and training providers do their best to stay ahead of the curve to create programs that develop newly required competencies so that individuals are adequately prepared to enter and remain in the workforce.

Industry factors impacting medical coding and related occupations include:

- Rollout of ICD-10, the current international classification of disease coding system, scheduled for rollout in October of 2014
- Changes in payment regulations that require an increased focus and scrutiny of medical coding functions
- An opportunity to increase and/or re-capture revenue by improving medical coding success
- Need for specialty coding expertise to meet the needs of different service settings and to maximize reimbursements
- Changing focus of medical coders from data entry to audit/review and complete integration with electronic medical records (EMR)
- Increasing opportunities for experienced coders to work remotely for Boston-based or national firms

In addition, the broad, less-defined area of health informatics continues to evolve as the industry demands more sophisticated analysis of patient data and better understands the occupations and competencies needed to do this work. Medical coding and related occupations are increasingly categorized as health informatics jobs¹.

¹ Jobs for the Future (2012), *A Growing Jobs Sector: Health Informatics*. Available on the JFF website: http://www.jff.org/sites/default/files/CTW_burning_glass_publication_052912.pdf

Occupational Overview

To begin the gap analysis process, the partnership reviewed the US Bureau of Labor Statistics to identify relevant job titles. The partnership quickly identified multiple job titles that include medical coding and related occupations that could be part of a structured career ladder. The partnership also recognized that current occupational titles and descriptions are not reflective of the current workplace. The following occupations were reviewed:

- Medical records and health information technicians
- Billing, cost and rate clerks
- Medical secretaries
- Medical transcriptionists
- Medical and Health Services managers

Table 1 provides an overview of available occupational data provided by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics. The highlighted occupations were deemed most relevant and identified for future discussion. It was noted that *Medical Records and Health Information Technicians* was most descriptive of a medical coder but did not adequately represented the work of a health information technician.

Table 1: Occupational Data, US Bureau of Labor Statistics, June 2012

Career and Occupational Information	Job Title (s)	Description
<p>Medical Records and Health Information Technicians SOC 29-2071.00 <i>Education:</i> Associates/certificate (some college) <i>Certification:</i> Multiple, including Certified Coding Associate, Certified Coding Specialist (AHIMA) <i>Outlook:</i> No outlook on O*Net</p>	<p>Sample of job titles: Medical Records Clerk, Health Information Clerk, Medical Records Technician, Office Manager, File Clerk, Medical Records Coordinator, Medical Records Analyst, Medical Records Director, Receptionist, Coder</p>	<p>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 in a manner consistent with the healthcare industry's numerical coding system</p>
<p>Billing, Cost, and Rate Clerks SOC 43-3021.02 <i>Education:</i> Certificate (some college) <i>Certification:</i> <i>Outlook:</i> Bright</p>	<p>Sample of job titles: Billing Clerk, Accountant, Accounts Payable Clerk, Billing Coordinator, Office Manager, Accounts Receivable Clerk, Administrative Assistant, Accounting Assistant, Billing Specialist, Contract Administrator</p>	<p>Compile data, compute fees and charges, and prepare invoices for billing purposes. Duties include computing costs and calculating rates for goods, services, and shipment of goods; posting data; and keeping other relevant records. May involve use of computer or typewriter, calculator, and adding and bookkeeping machines.</p>

Career and Occupational Information	Job Title (s)	Description
Medical Secretaries SOC 43-6013.00 <i>Education:</i> Certificate (some college) <i>Certification:</i> National Health Career Association's Medical Administrative Assistant Certification (CMAA) <i>Outlook:</i> Bright	Sample of job titles: Medical Secretary, Receptionist, Unit Support Representative, Office Manager, Medical Receptionist, Patient Relations Representative (PRR), Front Office Manager, Health Unit Coordinator, Medical Office Specialist, Patient Coordinator	Perform secretarial duties using specific knowledge of medical terminology and hospital, clinic, or laboratory procedures. Duties may include scheduling appointments, billing patients, and compiling and recording medical charts, reports, and correspondence.
Medical Transcriptionists SOC 31-9094.00 <i>Education:</i> Certificate (some college) <i>Certification:</i> varies <i>Outlook:</i> None provided on O*Net	Sample of job titles: Medical Transcriptionist, Transcriptionist, Radiology Transcriptionist, Medical Transcriber, Medical Language Specialist, Pathology Transcriptionist, Documentation Specialist, Medical Transcription Supervisor	Transcribe medical reports recorded by physicians and other healthcare practitioners using various electronic devices, covering office visits, emergency room visits, diagnostic imaging studies, operations, chart reviews, and final summaries. Transcribe dictated reports and translate abbreviations into fully understandable form. Edit as necessary and return reports in either printed or electronic form for review and signature, or correction.
Medical and Health Services Mgrs SOC 11-9111.00 <i>Education:</i> Bachelors/Masters <i>Certification:</i> varies <i>Outlook:</i> Bright	Sample of job titles: Office Manager, Nurse Manager, Health and Social Service Manager, Program Manager, Clinical Director, Director of Nursing, Medical Records Manager, Mental Health Program Manager, Nutrition Services Manager, Practice Administrator	Plan, direct, or coordinate medical and health services in hospitals, clinics, managed care organizations, public health agencies, or similar organizations.

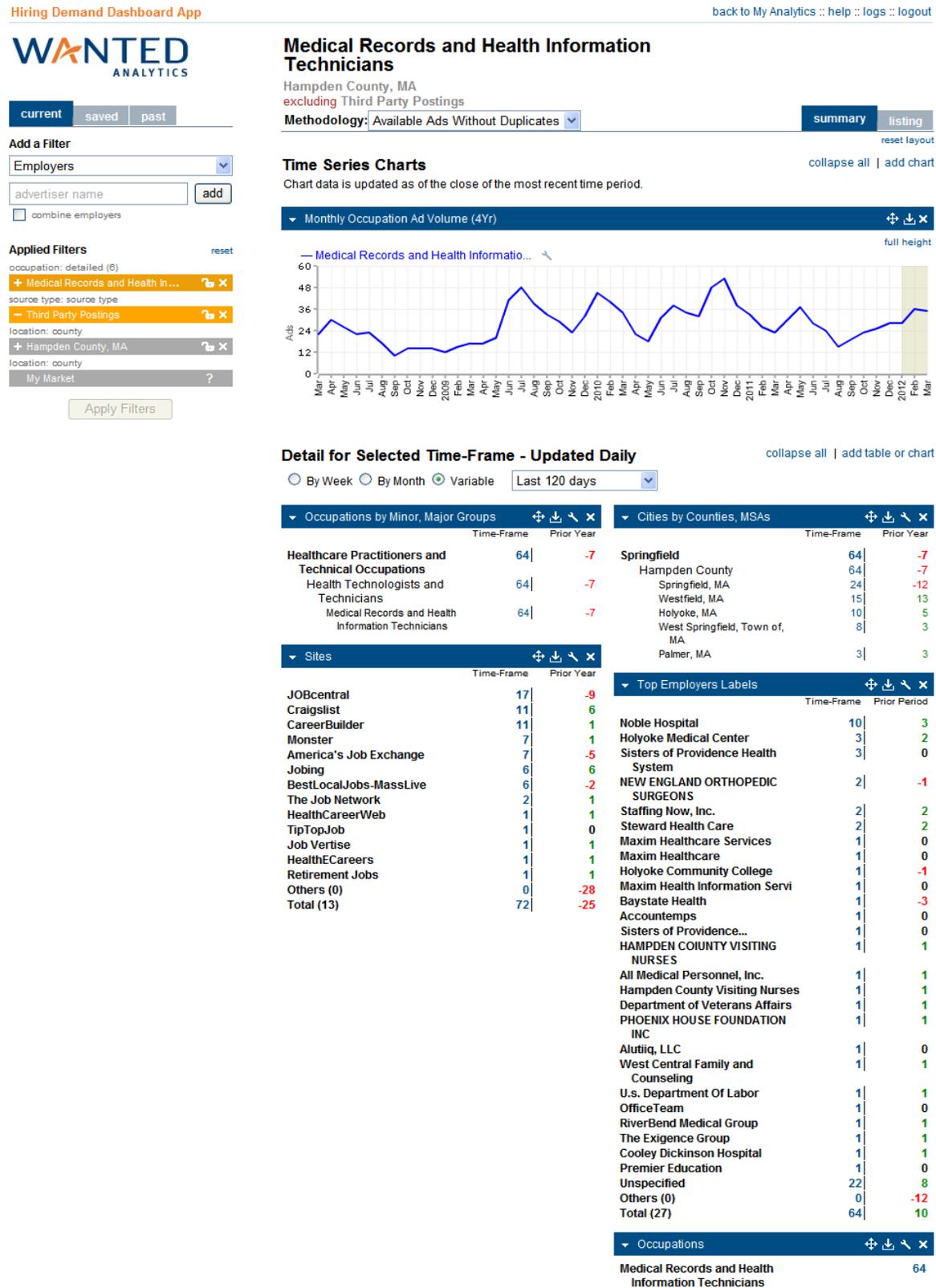
While employers have identified medical coding as a priority occupation, the number of people defined as Medical Coders in Hampden, Franklin and Hampshire County is relatively small. Table 2 provides the available occupational and wage data for the different occupations. It should be noted that Jobs for the Future maintains the occupational employment data provided by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics only includes 60% of jobs involved in capturing, analyzing and managing clinical data and other health information. Thus, the available data likely does not fully represent the number of individuals in these types of jobs.

Table 2: Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics, Springfield MA-CT Metro NECTA, Massachusetts Department of Labor (May 2011). Downloaded from www.mass.gov.

SOC Code	Occupation Title	Employment	Median	Mean	Entry	Experienced
29-2071	Medical Records and Health Info Techs	380	\$40,530	\$40,620	\$28,010	\$46,920
43-3021	Billing and Rate Clerks	810	\$34,450	\$35,140	\$24,910	\$40,260
43-6013	Medical Secretaries	1,730	\$35,770	\$35,780	\$26,710	\$40,310
31-9092	Medical Assistants	1,350	\$32,200	\$32,460	\$25,010	\$36,190
31-9094	Medical Transcriptionists	120	\$36,010	\$37,040	\$30,910	\$40,110
11-9111	Medical and Health Services Managers	810	\$91,870	\$113,130	\$70,120	\$134,640

In addition, the Franklin Hampshire Regional Employment Board provided the Partnership with a snapshot of real time job postings generated by WANTED Analytics™. Figure 1 provides an example of available job postings in Hampden County on June 26, 2012. This data highlights the types of employers with job postings that fall under the category of Medical Records and Health Info

Figure 1: Example of available job postings in Hampden County (extracted on June 26, 2012)



Technicians. It should be noted that WANTED Analytics™ data has some duplication and errors, but is useful to better understand the current job market. Appendix D provides additional data for Franklin and Hampshire counties.

Specifically, medical coders work in the following types of healthcare organizations:

- Physician offices
- Acute care hospitals
- Home health and visiting nurse agencies
- Staffing agencies
- Third party providers

Supply of Medical Coders and Related Occupations

As unlicensed positions, those entering into medical coding, billing or medical office administration do not have to adhere to standard education, training or certification requirements. Thus, employers in the region have different requirements for entry-level positions and for career advancement. The American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) has established standard competencies and program accreditation for medical coding programs. At present, Springfield Technical Community College uses their competencies and is seeking advanced accreditation.

Education Programs

Education and training providers in Western Massachusetts produce an adequate supply of entry-level medical coders, billers and medical office assistants. Regional education providers often combine medical coding and billing training into one program. Table 3 shows there are a range of credit and noncredit post-secondary certificate programs and one associate degree program.

Table 3: Regional education and training programs

Institution	Program	Options	Annual Graduates
Springfield Technical Community College http://www.stcc.edu/academics/medcoding.aspx	Medical Billing and Coding Specialist Program	Post-secondary credit-bearing certificate and AS degree.	Degree – 15-20 graduates Certificate – 15-20 graduates
Holyoke Community College http://www2.hcc.edu/programs/documents/MedCodingCM049.pdf	Medical Coding and Billing Program	Post-secondary credit-bearing certificate	Certificate – 15-20 graduates
American Career Institute, Springfield MA http://www.aci.edu/programs/medical-billing-coding	Medical Coding and Billing Program	noncredit certificate	TBD
Branford Hall, Springfield MA http://www.branfordhall.edu/Programs/Medical-Billing-and-Coding-Health-Claims-Specialist/40/	Medical Billing Program	noncredit certificate	TBD
Greenfield Community College http://www.gcc.mass.edu/media/docs/catalog/omn.pdf	Office Management program, with a medical office management option	AS degree	None at this time
Springfield Technical Community College	Medical Office Administration Program	AS degree	Degree – 5 graduates

http://www.stcc.edu/academics/medoff.aspx			
Massachusetts Institute of Career Development (MCDI)	Medical Office Administration Program	Noncredit certificate	Varies 2011 = 33 graduates

Practical Experience

Most new graduates are required to gain practical experience through an internship or externship. While a valuable experience, the education programs report difficulty in securing placements for their students with regional employers. Some employers cite the additional management time required to supervise interns and patient confidentiality issues. For those with/without the practical experience, new graduates seeking medical coding positions are often unable to secure positions due to lack of experience and depth of knowledge about certain specialty areas. Generally, new graduates find employment in small physician offices or in billing departments and then try to move into medical coding positions after gaining experience.

As part of the competency review process with employers, they were asked about the type of experiential learning strategies that could provide students with the necessary experience to land jobs. Their responses are below:

Question: What experiential learning strategies could provide students with the necessary experience to land a job?

Responses	# of Employer Responses
Internship/Co-op	6
Virtual Lab	2
Other	
• General Industry experience (coding exposure)	2
• Access to electronic medical records	2
• Specific training for home health coding	1
• Interactive soft skills	1
• Technical skills	1
• Coding entry exam	1

Through the employer survey, when employers were asked about their willingness to host student interns, 20% said yes, 46% said maybe and 33% said no.

Pre-Training Assessment

There is no universal pre-training assessment tool in use to assist prospective students determine if medical coding and related occupations are of interest or if they have the baseline knowledge, skill and aptitude for the occupation. The partnership reviewed the ACT WorkKeys© tool and has utilized as an assessment tool for other occupations. More information can be found about WorkKeys at <http://www.act.org/products/workforce-act-workkeys/>. Career centers and the community colleges have deemed it a useful tool.

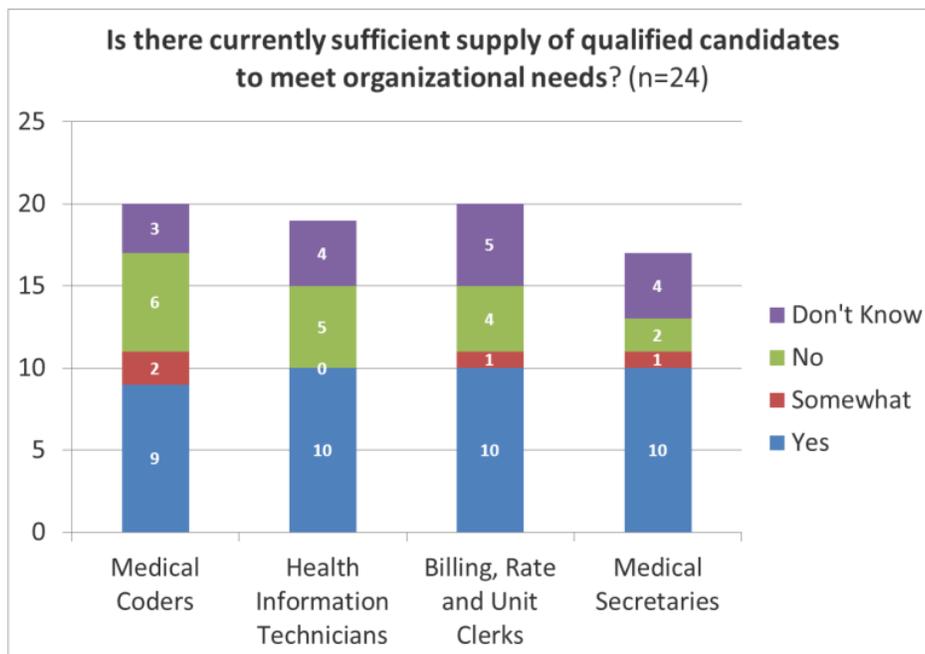
Demand for Medical Coders and Related Occupations

The Partnership conducted an online employer survey in May-June 2012 to better understand the demand for medical coders and related occupations. Thirty respondents participated in the survey representing a variety of service settings. The survey asked some questions specific to both medical

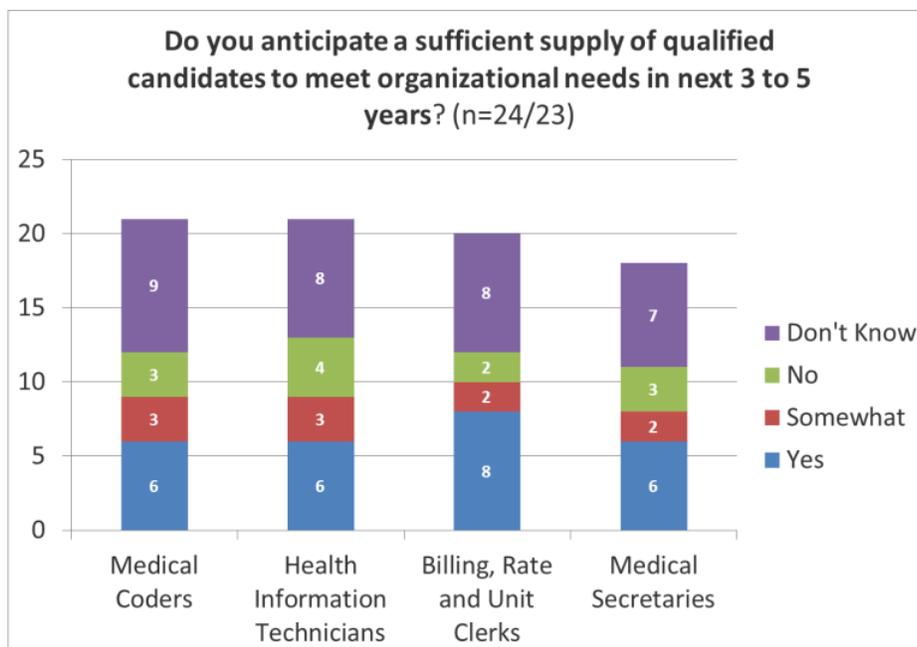
coding and related occupations, but the majority of its findings are focused on medical coding. The complete survey results can be found in Appendix B.

Hiring Projections

- The majority of employers anticipate little to no hiring of medical coders over the next 12 months, with the exception of Fazzi Associates, a home health coding company which projects hiring more than 25 medical coders over the next 12 months.



- Employers are mixed in their responses when asked whether they think there is currently an available pool of qualified candidates. They show a similar pattern when asked if they anticipate a sufficient supply of qualified candidates to meet organizational needs over the next 1-3 years.



- 68% of survey respondents do not foresee a large portion of Medical Coders retiring over the next 5-years. However, some anticipate retirements once ICD-10 is rolled out due to new training requirements.
- The majority of employers do not outsource coding or billing. The region has a home health coding company that provides third party services to healthcare organizations in the region and across the country.

Hiring Practices

- When hiring new coders, employers place a great deal of emphasis on demonstrated skill set, employment references and the interview.
- One employer uses a pre-hire assessment tool to measure skills and knowledge.
- Some employers hire registered nurses (RNs) who have coding knowledge and experience. RNs typically command a higher hourly rate than coders than graduates from coding programs who do not have clinical experience.
- Employers generally prefer to hire community college graduates because of the higher quality. However, some employers will also consider graduates from proprietary programs.
- Job titles and task functions vary by employer and the setting.
- Educational requirements are increasing as the job is becoming more complex, although there is no standard entry into practice requirements among employers
- Employers identified seven (7) different certifications for medical coders. Some employers require a certification in order to be hired while others require certification after one year on the job.
- Employers note that further development of soft skills is imperative to the overall performance and productivity of all employees involved in coding activities.
- New hires require a long orientation timeline (6 to 12 months) as they have significant mastery skill gaps compared to current employee skill mastery levels (see further discussion about competency gaps below)

Career Ladder

- 40% of employers either have a career pathway in place or “somewhat” of a career ladder in place for medical coders and related occupations. 60% of employers do not have a formal career ladder.

ICD-10 Preparations

- New ICD-10 coding language will have a large impact on new and incumbent medical coders.
- The majority of employers do not have or have only a limited plan in place to deal with ICD-10 adoption and anticipated impacts.

Medical Coder Competency Gaps

Training and Workforce Options (TWO), a collaboration between Holyoke Community College and Springfield Technical Community College, conducted a competency review session with representatives from five (5) employers using information provided by AHIMA and US Dept of Labor. AHIMA provides a detailed list of medical coding competencies organized into four (4) domains: life sciences, information technology, health information management, and clinical

classification systems. Employers validated the relevancy of the AHIMA competencies to the current workplace requirements for new hires and current employees. They also identified competency gaps. The areas with the most significant gaps are starred* below with the full results of the competency review exercises are located in Appendix C.

AHIMA Competency Domains	
Domain : Life Sciences	
1	Anatomy and Physiology
2	Medical Terminology
3	Pathophysiology
4	Pharmacotherapy & Laboratory Findings
Domain : Information Technology	
5	Introduction to Desktop Applications
6*	Computer Software Applications in Healthcare
Domain : Health Information Management	
7*	Introduction to Health Information Management & Healthcare Data Content and Structure
8*	Healthcare Delivery Systems
Domain : Clinical Classification Systems	
9/10	Basic Diagnosis and Procedure Coding Systems
11/12	Intermediate (or Advanced) Diagnosis and Procedure Coding
13*	Reimbursement Methodologies
14	Professional Practice Experience/Practicum/Internship

Specific technical knowledge and skill gaps identified by employers include:

- Consistently working with electronic medical records (EMR) and within multiple systems.
- Conducting qualitative analysis to assure that documentation in the health record supports the diagnosis and reflects the progress, clinical findings and discharge status of the patient
- Accessing and evaluating a Personal Health Record
- Demonstrating an understanding of the following: Health Information Management (HIM), Health Information Exchange, Health Information Organization
- Assist in using coded data for reporting
- Protect data integrity and validity using software or hardware technology

Employers also responded to a series of competency review questions regarding medical coders that give insights into different employer requirements for new and incumbent workers. Seven respondents representing 5 different employers answered the following questions:

1. What are your organizations 3-5 measures of medical coding employee success?
2. What are the top 3-5 attributes of your best medical coding employee?
3. What are the top 3-5 tasks that new employees have the most difficulty consistently performing?
4. What are 3 workplace/soft skill weaknesses you see in recently hired medical coders?

Note: The column entitled Frequency in the below tables refers to the number of employers that reported a particular competency as important based on how each question pertains to their specific organization. For example, in Question #1, 6 out of 7 participants (86%) stated "Quality, error rate" is a measure of success for medical coding in their organization.

#1: What are your organizations 3-5 measures of medical coding employee success?

Rank	Responses	Frequency	Percent
1	Quality, error rate	6	86%
2	Productivity, number of accounts coded/day	6	86%
3	General knowledge of diagnostic and procedure codes	4	57%
4	Medical terminology	2	29%
5	Anatomy and physiology	2	29%
6	Soft skills	2	29%
7	Computer skills, software application skills	2	29%
8	Analytical thought process	1	14%
9	Type of accounts coded	1	14%
10	Advancement on career ladder	1	14%
11	Ability to work independently	1	14%
12	Exceptional written and verbal communication skills	1	14%
13	Skills testing	1	14%
14	Client feedback	1	14%
15	Ability to retain	1	14%
16	Ability to respond to denials	1	14%

#2: What are the top 3-5 attributes of your best medical coding employees? (n=

Rank	Responses	Frequency	Percent
1	Communications skills, writing	5	71%
2	Expert knowledge of codes and coding guidelines	3	43%
3	Confidence interacting with physicians	2	29%
4	Medical terminology	1	14%
5	Detail orientation	1	14%
6	Focus	1	14%
7	Speed	1	14%
8	Reliability	1	14%
9	Patience and confidence	1	14%
10	Quality	1	14%
11	Ability to comprehend and translate operating notes	1	14%
12	Attitude	1	14%
13	Acceptance of errors	1	14%
14	Ability to teach others	1	14%
15	Advanced education, RHIT	1	14%

#3: What are the top 3-5 tasks your new medical coding employees have the most difficulty consistently performing?

Rank	Responses	Frequency	Percent
1	Working with EMR, working within multiple systems	4	67%
2	Learning our systems, understanding interaction between coding and OASIS; SMC, CIS, Quictrac	3	17%
3	Inpatient coding	1	17%
4	Using an encoder	1	17%
5	Communication	1	17%
6	CPT coding	1	17%
7	Multispecialty coding	1	17%
8	Keyboarding skills	1	17%
9	DRGs	1	17%
10	Productivity	1	17%
11	Navigating health information technology	1	17%
12	Focusing on single task for extended periods	1	17%
13	Admitting to knowledge gaps	1	17%

#4: What are the three greatest workplace or soft skill weaknesses you see in your recently hired medical coding employees?

Rank	Responses	Frequency	Percent
1	Communications skills, written and oral; ability to rebut coding denials	5	83%
2	Ability to interact well with others, interpersonal skills, relationship building	4	67%
3	Professionalism (dress/actions); workplace etiquette	3	50%
4	Communicator able to speak with physicians/leadership	1	17%
5	Receptiveness to feedback	1	17%
6	Data entry (accuracy and speed)	1	17%
7	Ability to focus	1	17%
8	Ability to work independently	1	17%
9	Reliability	1	17%

Finally, through open-ended discussion, most employers expressed frustration with work-readiness and workplace etiquette of prospective employees or new hires. They cited issues with professional attire, social media awareness and appropriate workplace behavior with technology. Soft skill deficiencies were discussed in the following areas:

- Communication skills – written and oral
- Problem solving and critical thinking skills
- Professionalism and work ethic
- Time management

Recommendations and Next Steps

While employers actively participated in the gap analysis process, additional employer input will further validate the gap analysis findings and strengthen the following recommendations. Below are suggested recommendations and next steps.

Align Existing Program Curriculum to Fill Gaps

- All regional training and education programs should review their existing curricula and make appropriate adjustments based on the competency review results and further input from employers.
- All regional training and education program should pay greater attention to enhancing the communication skills of new graduates to enable them to succeed in the workplace, including writing and interpersonal skills.

Develop a Regional Career Pathway

The region has an opportunity to develop and adopt a career pathway model that provides a clear sequence of coursework among current training/education providers and employers that aligns with employer-validated work readiness standards and occupational competencies.

- At a minimum, the career pathway model should align existing community college and quality proprietary school programs in medical coding, medical billing and medical office assistant programs. These programs should align and “stack” with each other. Credit for previous experience gained through noncredit programs and work experience should be considered.
- New health informatics programs at the associates and bachelor degree levels should be developed based on additional employer input. The academic programs should collaborate during development so that the programs clearly articulate and stack with the regional career pathway. The new AHIMA health information career map should be referenced in the development of new programs <http://www.hicareers.com/CareerMap/%20> as well as other promising practices.

Table 4: A possible career pathway model

Occupation: Medical Coder	Employability Skills	Soft Skills	Industry Sector and Career Knowledge	Core Coding Skills	Occupation Knowledge	Additional Coding Skill Mastery Level 1	Additional Coding Skill Mastery Level 2 or More
Occupation: Medical Billing Clerk	Employability Skills	Soft Skills	Industry Sector and Career Knowledge	Core Coding Skills	Occupation Knowledge	Additional Coding Skill Mastery Level 1	
Occupation: Medical Office Assistant	Employability Skills	Soft Skills	Industry Sector and Career Knowledge	Core Coding Skills	Occupation Knowledge		
Occupation: Healthcare Career Readiness Employability	Employability Skills	Soft Skills	Industry Sector and Career Knowledge				

- Programs should build on their strengths and continue to validate new program ideas with employers. Suggestions include:
 - HCC can consider a focus on medical billing only and stacking directly to STCC's associate degree in medical coding program.
 - STCC to pursue a AHIMA accreditation for their Associate's Degree program in Health Information and Informatics Management (HIM). This would create a stackable pathway from the existing Certificate in Medical Coding and Billing to the Associates Degree in Medical Coding and Billing to the Associates Degree in HIM, which would then prepare students for AHIMA's Registered Health Information Technician (RHIT) exam.
 - STCC can review their medical office assistant associate degree program to determine if a two year program meets employer needs.
 - STCC can give further consideration to the replacing of the medical coding certificate program with an Associate's (AS) degree program. While AHIMA suggests that an AS degree will become the standard entry into the occupation, further discussions with regional employers should occur.
- Using the standard curriculum being developed through the statewide Transformation Project community colleges should link the pathway with contextualized developmental education offered on each campus.

Specialty Coding Needs

- It is understood that regional education programs do not train new graduates to be proficient in any particular specialty coding area. However, there is significant regional growth in demand for medical coders with home care expertise and knowledge.
- Students should be made aware of these job opportunities early on in their educational experience so that they can consider the requirements for these positions.
- Experiential learning opportunities such as internships, co-ops or a virtual learning lab that focuses on home health coding could also be developed to give students a better understanding of this area of demand.

Communicate Credential Standards

- Employers should discuss standard credential requirements for entry and advanced positions. If standards can be identified and agreed upon, employers should communicate them to education providers and career counselors

Develop Alternative Approaches to Provide New Graduates with Practical Experience

- Alternative approaches to providing new graduates with practical experiences should be considered by education providers and employers. This includes addressing challenges in staffing to oversee interns and identifying those tasks that interns can legally and realistically take on.
- Educational programs should consider purchasing access to the AHIMA virtual learning lab for their students. The lab multiple software platforms, include the Cerner EMR system to provide students with hands-on medical coding experience. More information can be found at <http://www.ahima.org/schools/vlab/default.aspx>.

- Employers should utilize existing on-the-job training funding to support new graduates and offset the cost and associated risk of hiring individuals who lack experience.
- Employers should explore the feasibility of establishing a regional training center for new and incumbent workers to gain experience and receive ICD-10 training.

Utilize a Pre-Training Assessment Tool

- To ensure individuals select medical coding and related occupations with a greater awareness of occupational tasks and expectations, it is recommended that the One Stop Career Centers and the Community Colleges use the ACT WorkKeys Assessment tools.
- To further support occupational awareness and increase retention in medical coding educational programs, schools and employers should consider developing a simulated event that exposes interested students to the realities of medical coding. This could be modeled on STCC's "One Day Medical Encounter" recently deployed for those interested in becoming a certified nursing assistant and sterile processing technician.

Establish a Regional Approach to ICD-10 Training

- The partners should consider developing a regional approach to ICD-10 training for incumbent workers and integration into education/training programs. Although data indicates a lack of regional hiring over the next 12 months and a delay in the implementation of ICD-10 until 2014, there is sufficient time to plan and further refine implementation strategies.

Conduct Additional Research on Diversity of Medical Coding Workforce

- The gap analysis process did not explore the diversity of the medical coding workforce and the accessibility of existing programs to the diverse members of our community. Additional research should be conducted to determine the diversity of the existing workforce and the barriers that may exist for diverse community member to enter and succeed in medical coding and related occupations.

Next Steps

It is imperative that employers, education, workforce development systems, and community based organizations continue to work together:

- Develop a regional vision for a medical coder and related occupations career pathway
- Define roles and responsibilities of each key player and their next steps
- Identify a target audience for the career pathway and the different entry points
- Establish clear connections with Massachusetts Community Colleges Workforce Development Transformation Agenda.

References

Jobs for the Future (2012), *A Growing Jobs Sector: Health Informatics*

U.S. Department of Labor by Social Policy Research Association (2011), *Career Pathways Toolkit: Six Key Elements for Success*