With ICD-10 on the Horizon...

Should I Train Now or Wait?

Most anyone involved with delivering, receiving, or billing for healthcare has heard the buzz about the upcoming implementation of ICD-10. One population that will feel the greatest impact of the transition to ICD-10 is medical coders. Introduction of the new code set will permeate literally every aspect of a coder’s responsibilities. As a result, we often hear from students who are wondering if now is a good time to enter the field of medical coding. They worry that what they are currently learning will become obsolete and they will have to “start all over again.” The long and short of it is that now is still a good time to enter the field of medical coding. They worry that what they are currently learning will become obsolete and they will have to “start all over again.” The long and short of it is that now is still a good time to enter the field of medical coding.

1. **Cost** – The bottom line for a lot of people is: how much will it cost? The ICD-10 code set is many times more complex than the ICD-9 code set. This increase in complexity naturally indicates an increase in the time and resources required for instruction in its use. This could easily translate into increased cost for basic education in medical coding. However, an upside for working coders is the expectation that the cost for additional training to update to ICD-10 will be covered by employers.

2. **Necessity of employment** – Many people who are interested in training as a medical coder are looking to change careers or re-enter the workforce. Generally, the primary motivation is that they need a better job, and coding offers an opportunity for an improved employment situation in a continually growing field. The implementation of ICD-10 is still two years away. The ICD-9 code set will continue to be used up until the date of implementation. Currently, there is still an abundance of time to get trained, become certified, and work before it’s necessary to begin working in ICD-10.

3. **Complexity of Content** – One of the biggest advantages to training now is that the increased complexity of the ICD-10 code set will, just plain and simple, make it harder to learn. It’s important to recognize that the task of medical coding requires much more than simply locating the correct code in the code book. Skills such as documentation, interpretation, and understanding how to correctly apply the guidelines to ensure consistent, accurate, and complete coding often overshadow the actual need to find the code. In comparison to those who get their training after the implementation of ICD-10, the demand of learning correct coding practices will be somewhat less intense when not coupled with being a newbie at learning how to find codes in the more complex...
GRADUATES

Dana Chock – Brainerd, MN
I completed my Career Step education for Inpatient and Outpatient Coding and Billing in about 4 1/2 months, graduating with honors in June 2012. Shortly after graduation I received the CPC-A credential and since then, have also received the CCA credential. I am excited to say that I have recently started a great, exciting career with Essentia in Brainerd, MN. I have also accepted the nomination to be the 2013 AAPC Brainerd Chapter President. I am looking forward to pursuing additional credentials in the near future. Thank you so much Career Step! You taught me all the things that I needed to know to pass (ok - ace) the “pre-employment” test and continually demonstrate my abilities as a successful coder. I have told co-workers about your program and others that have expressed interest in pursuing a medical coding career. Once again - thank you!

Emily Copeland – Gobles, MI
This is an amazingly informative program. I learned way more than I ever thought possible, and truly feel ready to join the coding workforce!

Janet Manley – Chandler, AZ
I cannot express strongly enough how wonderful the Career Step program is. I have been out of school for many, many years and when I could not get work in my field of retail, decided to switch careers. Career Step was with me every “step” of the way. The support is wonderful. If I had a question whether technical or curriculum, I knew I would have my question answered quickly.

I would highly recommend Career Step to anyone wanting to work in the medical coding and billing field. The course is hard and there were times I wanted to give up, but with the support of my family and Career Step, I was able to graduate and look forward to a wonderful new career! Thank you so much!

Jennifer Jensen – Fargo, ND
Thanks to Career Step, I acquired a job within two months of graduating! It is quite an accomplishment and I highly recommend this program to those that are looking for a fulfilling career.

Jolynne Manfredonia – Monroe, NY
I just passed my CCA certification exam this past weekend! I am very pleased with all the support from the Career Step staff. Anytime I had a question or issue I was always assisted very quickly, either by telephone or e-mail. The course was easy to navigate and gave so many different coding scenarios to work through. Once the course is completed you definitely feel confident with your coding skills to move on to the certification exam and employment.

Marlene Lamangan – San Diego, CA
Career Step gave me the knowledge and skills to be confident in starting a new career.

Melanie Reynolds – Pearisburg, VA
I feel that Career Step is an excellent program to achieve coding education. I feel very confident in the skills that I have learned through taking the program. It is also wonderful to be able to take such classes in the comfort of your own home, and at your own pace. The Career Step staff has been very helpful and was always prompt to respond to any questions or problems I had, even now that I am a graduate. I am happy to report that I successfully passed my CCS exam only 3 days after completing your program, and I am currently searching for job opportunities. Thank you for all that you have done to help me reach my goals!

Sanjib Misra – Boston, MA
The program was really hard work-- lots of studying, practice, and taking exams. It was challenging, and I want to thank everyone for all the help they provided for me to earn my certificate. Currently I am employed as a Medical Records Field Technician. I am looking forward to obtaining my certification through AAPC.

Vicki Ehrsam – Plainfield, IL
As a stay at home mom for 14 years, it was necessary for me to regain some skills to get back into the workforce. Career Step not only gave me skills, but the self confidence I was lacking. It felt so good to be doing something for myself. I also have something to show for all of the hard work I put into it. I am currently working as the office manager for a chiropractor. It is amazing what Career Step has done for me. I would recommend this course to anyone. Thank you so much.

Danica Mills – Southern Pines, NC
I recently started working at Northern Westchester Hospital in Mount Kisco, NY. My position there is Administrative Assistant, and in a few months I will be joining the medical coding department part-time. This works great for me because nowhere I applied to prior responded with a statement involving my lack of experience in a hospital setting. Now I am working in a hospital setting, learning all the office equipment, helping out with tons of medical projects, brushing up on office skills, aiding in processes involving the billing department, and working beside other medical professionals. A year from now, I will be able to put on my resume that I have a year of hospital experience, 6+ months of that in medical billing and coding.

Being in the Medical Coding & Billing program at Fayetteville Tech/Career Step was probably one of the best decisions I ever made. Though the program was rigorous, Career Step was able to create a program that I could easily follow, understand, and quite enjoy. I am proud to be an honors graduate and CPC certified. Without the program, I wouldn’t be here today, working in a hospital and on my path to be the healthcare professional I have always wanted to be.

Doris Phillips – Lake Wylie, SC
The course was hard in the beginning but at the end it was more than worth it. I am so glad I took the Medical Coding/Billing course. I was also very proud of myself for doing this at the age of 61 and passing with honors.
Career Step Congratulates Our Recent Graduates

Albina Rae - Spring Creek, NV
Arthur - Rancho Cucamonga, CA
Ashley - Charleston AFB, SC
Barbara - Greenwood Lake, NY
Barbara - Norfolk, VA
Benjamin - New Kensington, PA
Beverly - Tempe, AZ
Brenda - Clovey, SC
Carol - West Lafayette, IN
Cheryl - Ellerbe, NC
Christina - Waynesboro, PA
Christine - Warwick, NY
Daisy - Plainfield, IL
Dana - Brainerd, MN
Danica - Fayetteville, NC
Danielle - Redlands, CA
Darby - Elko, NV
Dawn - Princeton, MN
DeAnna - Lancaster, PA
Debora - Rancho Cucamonga, CA
Deloris - Lake Wylie, SC
Denah - Port Saint Lucie, FL
Doris - Lake Wylie, SC
Elisabeth - El Mirage, AZ
Emily - Gobles, MI
Erica - Chambersburg, PA
Erin - Colorado Springs, CO
Fred - Camano Island, WA
Jackie - Snoqualmie, WA
Jennifer - Freeeland, MI
Jennifer - Fargo, ND
Jesse - Joliet, IL
Jessica - Pinehurst, NC
Jessica - Riverside, CA
Jodie - Littleton, CO
JoEllen - Schenectady, NY
Juliana - Hamburg, PA
Julie - Rockford, IL
Julie - Northbend, OR
Juliene - Gilbert, AZ
Kara - El Paso, TX
Karen - Littleton, CO
Kari - Sunset, SC
Katherine - Pocatello, ID
Kathleen - Mount Vernon, IN
Kathleen - Colorado Springs, CO
Kimberly - Charlotte, NC
Kimberly - Durham, NC
Laurie - Austin, TX
Lisa - Lunenburg, MA
Lydia - New Lenox, IL
Marelene - San Diego, CA
Maria - West Boylston, MA
Meagan - Coloma, MI
Meghin - Aberdeen, SD
Melanie - Narrows, VA
Mena - Clayton, NC
Michelle - Fort Campbell, KY
Michelle - Missouri City, TX
Miriam - Decatur, MS
Monica - Lone Tree, CO
Noel-Marie - Norfolk, VA
Patricia - Vista, CA
Raleitha - Durham, NC
Regina - Lynn Haven, FL
Robert - Yucaipa, CA
Rosemary - Springfield, OR
Samantha - Walden, NY
Sarah - Lake in the Hills, IL
Sarah - Marshallville, NC
Sarah - Fayetteville, NC
Scott - Winchester, CA
SeeMa - Ann Arbor, MI
Shawn - Marcola, OR
Sheila - Winnemucca, NV
Stacy - Fayetteville, NC
Stephanie - Rockdale, IL
Stephanie - El Paso, TX
Susan - Bluesprings, MO
Tamara - Bremerton, WA
Tatiana - Oceanside, CA
Teresa - Kent, WA
Terri - Woolwich Twp, NJ
Tiffany - Dunbridge, OH
Tiffany - Tarawa Terrace, NC
Vicki - Plainfield, IL
Warren - Upland, CA
Wende - Cedaredge, CO
Yovanna - Romeoville, IL

Congratulations to those that have recently reported passing a certification examination! 4/1/12 to 6/30/12

Carol Czepiel - 6/20/2012 - CCA
Dana Chock - 6/15/2012 - CPC
Denise Brady - 6/7/2012 - CCA
Erica Stahl - 4/7/2012 - CCA
Jackie Stambaugh - 6/16/2012 - CPC
Jennifer Snodgrass - 5/19/2012 - CPC
Jesse Santiago - 6/13/2012 - CCA
Kim Lee - 6/2/2012 - CPC
Lauren White - 5/12/2012 - CPC
Linda Davis - 5/25/2012 - CPC
Lisa Caris - 5/5/2012 - CPC
Maria Alexander - 6/16/2012 - CPC
Mama Burns - 6/23/2012 - CPC
Melanie Reynolds - 5/12/2012 - CCS
Melissa Roberts - 5/19/2012 - CPC
Michelle Snyder - 5/5/2012 - CPC
Peter Rayner - 5/19/2012 - CPC
Renee Milton - 5/12/2012 - CPC
Robin Feldman - 5/19/2012 - CPC
Ruslana Martchev - 5/31/2012 - CCA
Sarah Manker - 6/23/2012 - CPC
Susan Corona - 5/19/2012 - CPC
Thomas Karamintzas - 4/21/2012 - CPC
Yovanna Hardy - 6/16/2012 - CPC

New Team Member!
Meet Craig Laursen, Career Step Graduate Support

Hi! I’m Craig Laursen, a new member of the graduate support team at Career Step. I came to Career Step after seven years in sales and human resources where I specialized in corporate training, customer service, and compliance auditing. I really enjoy school. Not only have I obtained my Bachelors Degree in Psychology, but I also recently completed the pre-requisite coursework for medical school, and would love to be a student in some capacity for as long as possible. My passion for education makes working with Career Step students and graduates fun and rewarding every day.

When I’m not at work I enjoy spending time with my young family. We love to ride bikes, swim at the lake, and cook together. My hobbies include basketball, fishing, pottery, and travel. In all aspects of my life, I wholeheartedly subscribe to the theory that the more effort and energy you invest in something, the greater the rewards you receive.

Enough about me! This Bulletin is about you and your bright future as a medical coder! I wish you the best and look forward to working with you after graduation. Now, HIT THE BOOKS!
Win the Job Search Gold!

Realistic Expectations

Having recently concluded the 2012 London Olympics, we have observed athletes from all around the world coming together to compete. We have heard their inspiring stories of triumph and defeat, watched dreams become reality, and, in some cases, observed heartache from a career ending injury or unmet expectations. While injuries are often out of their control, there are certain precautions an Olympic athlete can take to prevent the kind of heartache that particularly stems from unmet expectations.

Every Olympic athlete sets realistic expectations for themselves—many of them beginning in childhood. They did not expect to become an Olympic athlete without putting in the long, grueling hours of training. Instead, they expected to spend the majority of their time doing just that. They knew the time and effort they put into their training would not be easy, but it was to help them meet their future goals. Much like an Olympian, you have a future goal to achieve—employment as a medical coder. You are training hard in order to do so, but your effort will need to continue much further than the point of passing the final exam. Now is the time, as a student, to set your job search expectations.

After you complete your training, what can you realistically expect from your job search? First and foremost, you must remember that a job will not come to you. The Olympics never came to anyone who sat at home watching them, waiting for the opportunity to fall into their lap. Instead of swimming laps or lifting weights, your training will include building an industry targeted resume, networking, learning how to interview well, and passing a national certification exam. Like training for the Olympics, this preparation is not easy and does not happen overnight. Thus, you can realistically expect your job search to be a job in and of itself.

That being said, please remember that an Olympic athlete is not left to train alone—they have coaches and teammates to help them throughout their years of preparation. Likewise, the Career Step Graduate Support team is here to help coach you through your search for employment. Once you graduate, you will be given access to a variety of resources to help teach you how to build a resume, pass a national certification exam, interview well, and find a job that fits what you are looking for. Of course, when it comes down to it, your coach cannot compete in the Olympics for you. Similarly, most of your job search depends on you. Your Career Step ‘coaches’ will train you to the best of their ability; however, we cannot place you in a position. We are here to be your live support, answer any questions you may have throughout your search for employment, and do all that we can to help you succeed. In addition, you have access to the forums, helping you connect with a variety of ‘teammates’ who are also rooting for your success!

Before an athlete is eligible to compete in the Olympics, they must first succeed in the qualifying round. This qualifying round lets the Olympic committee know that these athletes have trained hard and are prepared to represent their country. Likewise, you become eligible for employment by making it through a qualifying round, known as a national certification exam. You have the option to become a certified coder through taking either the CPC through the AAPC or the CCA through AHIMA. Passing a certification exam lets employers know that you have received adequate training and are ready to hit the ground running in a medical coding position.

Once you have accepted a position, what can you realistically expect from your first medical coding job? Like any new field, there will be a transition period. As most Olympians don’t win a gold medal at their first games, you will probably not obtain perfect accuracy and complete 30 reports your first day on the job. You will need to get accustomed to a new group of co-workers and various office policies. Please be patient with yourself! Pay attention to feedback from additional coaches (coding managers, mentors, etc.) and learn how to implement their suggestions for improvement. Remember—your coaches are always there to help you and have your best interests in mind. They are trying to help you become the best you can be!

In addition to realistic expectations for your preparations, enter the industry with realistic expectations for the conditions in which you will be working. No athlete begins their career enjoying the same perks a seasoned gold medalist does. It generally takes an athlete several years of training and excellent performance to obtain sponsorship, increased salary, and additional benefits. Likewise, it does take experience and performance to raise your salary, obtain a more flexible schedule, and work from home in the medical coding industry.

Starting any new industry is difficult and takes time to adjust to—and medical coding is no different. Remember, with hard work and determination, you can also reach this level!

Approaching your job search with realistic expectations will help you avoid the unwanted heartache that can follow unmet expectations. Set high goals and work your hardest, but make sure you have a clear understanding of the industry and what to expect. After graduating from the program, you have the training you need to succeed! Keep this in mind, continue your preparations, and go for the gold!

-Alison Stapley
CS Graduate Support
I'm glad that I found Career Step. I had a degree in Biology, but still found this course most definitely intense. The program was very detailed, structured, and thorough. I feel that the Career Step program really does teach you the steps to proper coding. I am so grateful for all I learned through the program and for the Career Step staff. Randy, Cari, and Jenae are so supportive and helpful along the way. I would say they are the backbone of the Career Step family.

I went to Randy and Cari to ask even the smallest of questions, but even with all my emails and phone calls, they were so helpful. In addition, the graduate support help I got from Jenae was wonderful. Jenae helped me with my resume, job search, and had so many tips to find a job. The support I received during the training was invaluable and assisted greatly in my success.

To all the new students, I would suggest studying each day and taking notes in a way you will understand later; this is the secret of success. In addition, if you are not understanding, contact the wonderful staff; they are extremely supportive and helpful. The practicum part of the course is excellent and everything will come together there. That was my favorite part of the course.

I graduated with high honors and just recently passed my CPC exam through AAPC. Many students on the forums suggested buying the AAPC practice exam, but I chose not to buy them. I am very happy and satisfied that I passed. I feel the program prepared me for the certification, and Career Step was a very positive experience for me.

- Puspa Sahoo, CPC-A

---

**Dear Cari...**

**Is modifier -51 appended to radiology codes?**

**Thanks,**

- Mystified in Memphis

Dear Mystified,

The purpose of modifier -51 is to identify a situation where multiple procedures that are part of a surgical package are performed during the same session. This is because certain parts of the surgical package (i.e., pre and post op care) are common to all the procedures performed, because they would have to be provided regardless of the number of procedures the patient had performed at that time. The physician gets reimbursed for 100% of the primary procedure, and then the additional procedures identified by the use of modifier -51 are reimbursed at 50% of their full reimbursement value. This is so the provider does not get paid multiple times for the work involved in the parts of the surgical package that are common to all the procedures. Additionally, modifier -51 is not for use with add-on codes or for hospital outpatient use.

Here are some additional comments from the AMA and the CPT assistant that clarify the use of modifier -51 with codes from the CPT radiology series:

AMA Comment: “No. Modifier ‘-51,’ Multiple procedures, is generally not reported with the 70000 series codes. The use of the multiple procedure modifier ‘-51’ in the 70000 series of codes is applied only to the nuclear medicine codes 78306, 78320, 78802, 78803, 78806, and 78807.”

CPT Assistant, July 2008 Pages: 7, 8, 15: “To understand modifier -51, it is useful to understand the surgical package concept and the concept of preservice, intraservice, and postservice relative value unit (RVU) valuation. Modifier -51 is about overlapping and potential duplication of RVUs when more than one service is performed on the same date by the same qualified healthcare professional.”

Since the 70000 series codes are not part of a surgical package and do not have common portions involved when multiple procedures are performed, they would not have modifier -51 appended to them.

Keep up the good work!

- Cari Greenwood, CCS, CPC

CS Student Support Team
Student in the Spotlight

Enoch Blatnick

My name is Enoch Blatnick. I have been enrolled in Career Step’s coding and billing course for the last two months. I currently live in Kaysville, Utah with my wife Bryce and two-year-old daughter Chloe.

I have always been interested in computers and have spent most of my free time tinkering with them. After high school I started my own business building video game controllers. After five years I decided to sell the business and try something new. I tried several jobs including masonry construction and semi truck driving. I decided one day that I wanted to spend more time with my family and be able to work from home. My friend told me about medical coding and suggested that I look into it. I did research online about how to get certified and discovered Career Step.

Career Step is a perfect fit for me because I am able to study at my own pace and not be slowed down with busy work. With my two-year-old and living in a one bedroom home it has been a real challenge to find quiet time to study. I found that after the family goes to bed is the best time to study. I stay awake until the early morning hours crunching as much information into my brain as I can. The study planner has been encouraging to see how many hours it was supposed to take to do the module compared to how many it actually did.

If I could offer any tips they would be, first and foremost, to take breaks. You need to step away from the computer occasionally and allow the information to sink in. Second, make real flash cards. I made a set during the terminology modules and had my wife quiz me backwards and forwards, which helped immensely. Third, take it one step at a time. I know that the program can be overwhelming but just keep turning the pages. I can’t wait until I am finished with the program and can start my new career!

- Enoch Blatnick

New Team Member!

Meet Rebecca Brailsford, Career Step Coding and Billing Student Support

Hi, I am Rebecca. I am a native of Utah and love the wild outdoors. I graduated from Southern Utah University with a Bachelors Degree in Business and slowly gravitated toward the healthcare industry. Medical coding has been a good fit for me as I love numbers and the human body completely fascinates me.

Career Step provided the education I needed to become a certified coder. After graduation, I spent a few years coding for a group of orthopedic physicians and surgeons, and I really enjoyed my time there. Now I am back with Career Step and am excited to be helping students progress through the program as they work toward becoming certified coders and as they begin or advance their own careers.

Layman’s Dictionary of Medical Terms, continued

Pathological: a reasonable way to go (logical path)
Pharmacist: person who makes a living dealing in agriculture (farm assist)
Post-Operative: a letter carrier
Protein: in favor of young people (pro-teen)
Recovery room: place to upholster furniture
Red blood count: Dracula
Saline: where you go on your boyfriend’s boat (sailing)
Secretion: hiding something
Sterile solution: not using the elevator during a fire
Tablet: a small table
Terminal illness: getting sick at the airport terminal
Tumor: an extra pair (two more)
Varicose: nearby (very close)
Urine: opposite of “You’re Out!”
Continued from pg 1

code set. Additionally, by training now, the coder will have time to get employed and get their feet under them in regard to correct coding practices, before having to tackle the more complex ICD-10 set of codes.

4. Certification – Taking an exam is not usually on someone’s top 10 list of things they enjoy doing, thus we often hear from students that they have some amount of concern about how they will perform on certification exams. As the ICD-10 code set is much more complex than the ICD-9 code set, it stands to reason that the certification exam will also be more complex, and therefore more difficult. Those who train now will have the opportunity to become certified by taking a presumably easier exam based on the ICD-9 codes.

All in all, whether you train and certify under the ICD-9 or ICD-10 code set, coding is a great profession with lots of opportunity for growth and advancement; however, there are definitely advantages to getting your coding education now as opposed to waiting until after the implementation of ICD-10.

-CS Coding Support Team