Facing the fork in the road: CCA or CPC

Which exam is the one for me?

You decided a few months ago to change careers, and after a lot of research you selected the growing and dynamic field of health care. After finding that coding might be an excellent fit and making it the career of your choice, you researched available schools that could offer you training in the field. After considering a number of options, you selected Career Step as the provider for your education. Then, you arrive at the day when you pass the final exam and you heave a sigh of relief. In the midst of the practicum and wrapping your brain around “late effects,” you thought the day would never come.

You’ve made so many decisions up to this point to get you here, and now that you’ve graduated, you face one more decision, one that will help you make that last step toward finding employment in the industry. You’ve heard of AAPC and AHIMA, but you are unsure which certification exam is right for you.

Overcoming the Common Misconceptions of Certification

I’m still a student, and I don’t need to worry about membership until after I graduate.

Even if you’re still a student, it’s a great time to start thinking about your credentials. AAPC offers a student discounted membership of $70 (a big savings when compared to the standard membership price of $120). As a Career Step student you qualify for that discount, and if you want to save some money and reap the benefits of a membership early, we’d encourage you to look into membership to either AAPC or AHIMA while you are still finishing up your training.

I don’t need to certify.

Many employers will only hire certified graduates. Certified graduates are in high demand. They also tend to find jobs more quickly and tend to have higher salaries than graduates that are not certified.

It doesn’t matter which certification exam I take.

Career Step Graduates are prepared to take either the CCA exam through AHIMA or the CPC exam through AAPC. Many coders after obtaining their CCA and CPC and gaining a few years of experience on-the-job go on to earn a specialty certification or mastery-level certification (CPC-P, CPC-H, CCS, CCS-P, etc.)

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From Student to Graduate:
The road map to your success!

It’s hard to plan a road trip without a map and without a route in mind, and it’s hard to enjoy a trip without some stops along the way and resources to help you out. Graduation and finding employment as a coder might seem like a destination that is still far away while you’re a student, so Career Step offers a number of tools and resources available to help keep you on track and reach your destination successfully.

Orientation Consultation
This group consultation is offered to students who have just enrolled in the medical coding training program. It reviews items discussed in the Program Orientation—specifically the Tips for Success section. Featured discussion items include the best way to complete the course, resources and tools available, and things to keep in mind as you’re working through your coursework. This consultation is held bimonthly on Thursdays at 9:30 a.m. MST, and it is conducted by one of our Coding Support advisors through a toll-free number.

Career Step’s Medical Coding Student Forum
The CS Student forum exists for students of Career Step’s medical coding program to research, ask questions, share information and tips for success, and find (or provide) encouragement and support. The forums are private—only CS students, graduates, staff members, and industry professionals allowed—so it’s very safe, searchable, and helpful. If you prefer not to interact you don’t have to—you are welcome to just read and benefit from the information already there. If you are short on time you don’t have to read through everything—simply use the Find feature to locate the conversations and information in which you are interested.

Almost every question you will ever have during the course has been discussed on the forums, and often in great detail! Course announcements and scheduled chat schedules are also found here. If you haven’t discovered the forums you could be missing out on a lot!

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So what’s the answer? Which one should you take? That decision, like the others you have already made, is up to you. Both the CCA and the CPC are nationally recognized certification exams that will help you in your efforts to find employment as a coder, and students have been successful after joining either organization and taking either of the two exams. We want to help and assist you as much as possible in making an informed decision as to which exam is right for you.

Here are a few tips to get you started:

* Research the benefits of membership in each organization
* Consider the differences in price, format, and exam availability
* Consider your future goals and talk to potential employers in your area

We are happy to help you make a decision and provide information and resources to help you choose an exam, register, and prepare for it. We would suggest logging onto the forum and chatting with past graduates to see what their preferences have been, and getting in touch with graduate support here at Career Step. Feel free to email me with any questions you have!

jenae.walkercareerstep.com

-Jenae Walker
CS Graduate Support

### Coding Bulletin Challenge

- rhinoplasty
- bulbose
- blepharoplasty
- electrocautery
- excision
- debulking
- dissection
- septum
- incision
- deformity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>AHIMA (CCA)</th>
<th>AAPC (CPC)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Membership Price</strong></td>
<td>$165</td>
<td>$120 standard, $70 student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exam Price</strong></td>
<td>$205 (for AHIMA members), $260 (for non-members)</td>
<td>$300 * includes one free retake of the exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Networking</strong></td>
<td>AHIMA conventions, seminars, and web-based training, private Coding &amp; Billing forums/Communities of Practice</td>
<td>Local Chapter seminars and meetings, National/Regional Conferences, private Coding &amp; Billing online forums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Continuing Education</strong></td>
<td>Member magazines, industry newsletters, online quizzes, national events</td>
<td>Member magazines, industry newsletters, workshops, local/national events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employment Help</strong></td>
<td>AHIMA’s job postings, Career Assist, volunteer opportunities, etc.</td>
<td>AAPC’s job board, resume postings, job listings, Project Extern, etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Discounts and Savings</strong></td>
<td>Discounts on exams, seminars/events, coding and billing products and services</td>
<td>Coding and billing related products and services, discounted insurance, etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>About Exam</strong></td>
<td>Format: 2-hour exam, 100 multiple-choice questions. Exam is taken in-person, on a computer at a designated local testing center. To locate an exam site: <a href="http://prometric.com/AHIMA/default.htm">http://prometric.com/AHIMA/default.htm</a> Exam results are provided to you immediately after you finish/submit your exam.</td>
<td>Format: 5 1/2 hour exam, 150 multiple-choice questions. Exam is taken in hard-copy-in-person at a designated local testing center. To locate an exam site: <a href="http://www.aapc.com/certification/locate-examination.aspx">http://www.aapc.com/certification/locate-examination.aspx</a> Exam results are provided to you in 7-10 days following the exam date.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dear Cari...

Dear Frustrated,

The use of code V58.67 to indicate long-term current use of insulin is only used with patient's who are type II diabetic. Some type II diabetics require insulin use to control their blood sugars and others do not. If a type II diabetic is using insulin it is important to report that with a V code because the use of this medication will affect the physician's management of the patient.

Type I diabetics require the use of insulin to live. The use of insulin is implied in the diagnosis of Type I diabetes itself. Since this is the case, it is not necessary to report a V code for long-term insulin use because it would be understood that this patient would be using insulin.

The coding guideline from chapter 3 that you referred to specifies the use of code V58.67 where it says, “For type II patients who routinely use insulin, code V58.67, Long term (current) use of insulin, should also be assigned to indicate that the patient uses insulin.”

Happy Coding!!
Cari

- Cari Greenwood, CCS, CPC
CS Student Support Team

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Dear Cari,

I assigned code V58.47 on a record for a patient who is diabetic and using daily insulin injections. When I checked my answers I was marked wrong. Don’t the coding guidelines say I need to report this code for diabetic patients who are using insulin?

Thanks so much,

Frustrated in Fresno

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Bi-Monthly Coding Chats
Coding chats allow you to ask questions and receive answers in real-time. The second and fourth Wednesdays are days to keep marked on your calendar as members of the support team and members of the CS medical coding community will gather to attend, exchanging valuable information that can be extremely helpful to students and graduates alike. All chats are logged in the Career Step Resources forums, and are very helpful to read if you are unable to attend every chat, or want to catch up on some information that was discussed in a previous chat.

Daily Blitz Chats
The newest feature of the Career Step program allows students access to the support team weekdays from 12:00 to 12:15 MST for answers to any questions you might have about any CS program. Even though it’s a quick 15 minutes, there is a lot of valuable information available for Career Step students. Students can also access an ongoing transcript of the blitz chats for needed information or for later review.

3M
As an industry leader, and one of the most common coding software databases used on-site at hospitals and medical facilities, 3M is an exciting resource we offer to our students enrolled in our Inpatient Outpatient Medical Coding and Billing Program. With access to medical dictionaries, manuals, desk references, diagrams and tables coders need on a daily basis, 3M is an incredible resource that is important to become familiar with early on in program. Students enrolled in the Outpatient Medical Coding and Billing Course will still be sent hard copies of the references they need, and do not receive with 3M.

Coding Consultation
Student Support offers coding consultations every Tuesday at 4:00pm MST and Thursday at 10:30am to all students who have begun the coding portion of the course, or who are currently working anywhere in the coding modules. The transition from the first half of the course to the coding coursework can be difficult, and this consultation works to facilitate that transition and provide you with tips for coding success. During this consultation advisors will discuss using the three code books, specifically best practices for consulting ICD-9-CM guidelines and CPT guidelines, paying close attention to documentation, and how to accurately use the Index and Tabular List. Students are strongly encouraged to take advantage of this opportunity to maximize their training and to help them become proficient and productive medical coders. Please feel free to contact us at codingsupport@careerstep.com to schedule a date and time.

Pre-Practicum Consultation
Coding Student Support also offers pre-practicum consultations. Just before jumping into approximately 150 hours of practicum coding authentic medical records, we want to make sure you have the resources you need to succeed during that portion of the program. Discussion topics include advice on pacing yourself through the reports, using your code books appropriately, and preparation for the final and certification exam after graduation. These consultations are held Mondays at 4:00pm MST and on Wednesdays at 10:30 am MST.

Tech Support Team
Isn’t technology grand—until your system decides to crash, then you wonder why we invented computers at all. Have no fear! Our Technical Support Team can help you with numerous issues that would impede you from doing the course. They can help you with sound file players, course page bugs, and basic 3M support. If there’s something they can’t fix, they will work with you or direct you to where you can find a solution.

- Jenae Walker
CS Coding Graduate Support
Student in the Spotlight - Mark Krebs

I guess that you could say that I am a transplanted east coastian. I moved to Sioux Falls, SD from Virginia in December of 2001. I have a 5-year-old son, and I am currently engaged with a tentative wedding date of sometime next summer. I live at home with my son, fiancé and her mother as well as an orange cat named Frankie.

What led me to Career Step was actually a program through my local unemployment office. I had been out of work for about two months and during a job search program, I was told about the Workforce Investment Act. So I went through the application process and found out what I needed to do. I decided on medical billing and coding because I have always been involved in health care in some way, shape or form. I have been an EMT-Basic, a health care management student and now a billing and coding student.

One of the best things I have found about the Career Step program is the ease of being able to ask questions of either staff members or other students. The forum has been an invaluable resource for not only being able to ask questions of others, but also to post information which I feel may be of some value to the other students in the program. Yes, this is a difficult program, but it is also fun at times. There are many different things that I never would have learned had I pursued another career in health care.

I know that it may get frustrating at times, but probably the best piece of advice that I can give to students and graduates alike is to keep your head up. If you are confused about something, don’t hesitate to ask. There are many times that I have started looking at something, and then gotten stuck to the point where I was frustrated. In these times, I took a step back and looked at the problem or question from another angle. I used my other references, which I have gathered along the way through the course and, eventually, I was able to complete the problem with ease.

As of right now, I am 30% of the way through the second block of medical procedures coding. I have set a goal for myself to be finished with everything on or before March 31. From there, I plan on seeking certification from both the AHIMA and the AAPC. I feel that by holding credentials from both of these organizations, along with the wonderful reputation of Career Step, I should have very little trouble finding a job after graduation. Until then, I am going to keep working on understanding the vast amounts of information and learning to use my resources as effectively as possible.

I want to wish everyone in the program the best of luck. Keep your heads up. Always remember, “There’s no crying in coding”. Happy coding!

- Mark Krebs

Graduate in the Spotlight - Aimee Block

Hello. My name is Aimee Block. I live on a ranch in western South Dakota with my husband and three kids. The ranch has been in our family for 100 years, and we raise commercial Limousin cattle. We also raise a few horses, which is a favorite pastime of mine.

I graduated from Career Step’s Medical Coding course in September of 2009 after two years of studying. It took me a little longer to complete the course because of the demands of family and life in general, but it was well worth the hard work it took to finish. I took the American Academy of Professional Coders national certification exam in November and began working as a Certified Medical Coder-Apprentice in December.

I feel very fortunate to have found a job so quickly. Now that I am working in the field, I am so thankful for the education I received through Career Step. The way Career Step breaks the course down and keeps reiterating the important parts of this course are vital parts to the graduate’s success.

The job that I took is with a professional outsourcing office which contracts with healthcare facilities to do their medical coding, billing and accounts receivable. I am currently working in the office full-time, but will soon be able to transition to working from home as a remote coder.

The reason I went into the medical coding profession was to be able to work from home and have the flexibility to manage a full-time job that pays well and time with my family.

Finding a job after course completion can be a grueling task, but I was instructed to make sure the job is a right fit for you and your family. Career Step was also so helpful with final exam and certification exam tips as well as job-hunting advice. Thank you Career Step for your program set-up and professional staff. I feel that I will have a very rewarding medical coding career with endless possibilities.

A Very Happy Graduate,

- Aimee Block
The Ergonomic Topic

Your Chair

Ergonomics often deals with small adjustments that seem inconsequential until you work without them. With this in mind, let’s talk about your chair.

Just because your chair is advertised as ergonomic doesn’t mean it fits you. You should adjust any chair you’re using for your individual height and leg length. Any chair that is adjusted to fit you will be more comfortable than an expensive “ergonomic” chair that is not adjusted for you.

Make sure your chair lets your feet sit flat on the floor, with your thighs at about 90 degrees. If you’re short you may need to lower your chair. This facilitates venous return and keeps you comfortable, so you stay focused for longer periods of time, and your feet won’t swell up. If you’re tall and your chair is too low you’ll have a tendency to crunch up in the middle; you may need to raise your chair to achieve the same goal. Just remember—if it doesn’t fit, adjust it!

Don’t perch. Sitting swaybacked, with your behind on the edge is usually the result of a chair that’s too high for you. An ergonomically correct chair allows you to adopt a more healthy posture, so your body functions more efficiently, without pain. Keep your fanny in the chair, an your lower back supported by the chair back.

Don’t slouch. Sit straight, maintaining the natural lordotic curve of your back. When you slouch, you lose this curve; it flattens out and you end up putting a lot of pressure on your sacrum, which is uncomfortable and unhealthy.

Finally, adjust the armrests so your elbows bend at about 90 degrees, with your lower arms parallel to the floor. This allows your forearms and hands to naturally sit on the desk in front of you.

Here’s to happy sitting!

- Jill McNitt
CS Student Support Team

Upcoming Chats

April 14, 2010
9:30 AM MST

April 28, 2010
3:30 PM MST

May 12, 2010
9:30 AM MST