

CORE CDI

Clinical Documentation Improvement-Moving Your Career Forward

Clinical Documentation Improvement Specialists have a responsibility to continually advance and grow their careers through self-education, attendance at webinars, in-person conferences and teleconferences, possessing an insatiable appetite for learning and expanding their breadth and depth of knowledge in principles of clinical documentation. Reference to career growth is made towards furthering one's knowledge and understanding of solid principles of clinical documentation beyond methodologies of reimbursement including the MS-DRG system, CCs/MCCs, Hospital Acquired Conditions, Present on Admission indicators, and Severity of Illness and Risk of Mortality reporting. While I am not downplaying the relevance in practical operational understanding of the intricacies of reimbursement methodologies, the requirements of clinical documentation in today's movement towards Valued Based Cost-Effective Care demand much more than diagnosis reporting. Value Based Cost Effective Outcomes Based Care incorporates a level of documentation that as a whole most physicians are not familiar with, contributing to tremendous voids in documentation. This is where clinical documentation improvement specialists are essential. The profession plays a key role in collaborating with physicians, working with them closely in groups and individually in the sharing of best practices and standards of clinical documentation, providing actionable knowledge that physicians can employ in their regular practice of medicine regardless of setting.

Getting Started

First and foremost, clinical documentation improvement specialists must recognize their responsibility as professionals to invest the time, energy and commitment to expanding their understanding and appreciation for the value of clear, concise, contextually correct and complete clinical documentation to the overall delivery of healthcare. This expands well beyond our current skill sets, core knowledge and competencies as the standard in the industry. The core skills and knowledge we attain from CDI consulting company training, attendance at ACDIS and AHIMA webinars and conferences and the myriad of articles and resources readily available provide a solid foundation for a clinical documentation improvement specialist with emphasis upon "solid foundation." Passing of the ACDIS CCDS credentials or AHIMA CDIP demonstrates commitment to the profession of CDI and simply marks the beginning of a long journey to continual learning and acquiring up-to-date knowledge and understanding of best practice principles of documentation. One of the major shortfalls in the current practice of CDI is the general satisfaction with the status quo and apathetic attitude towards wholesale changes in processes. To some extent industry practices are driven by CDI consulting companies defining what constitutes "standards of practice" including performance Key Performance Indicators and overall scales of efficiencies in chart review. In some ways an argument can be made that the CDI profession has matured and reach a plateau with most CDI professionals content with their present job duties and responsibilities of daily chart review of twenty-five records and achieving a query rate of 30%. I am calling on CDI professionals to recognize that a decision to become a CDI specialist is one vested in a career, not just a job, and accordingly this implies a commitment to continually learning and growing one's core knowledge, skill sets and competencies by stepping outside one's comfort zone.

Comfort zones tends to stagnate growth, development and innovation with negative consequences for the profession both individually and collectively.

Developing a Road Map

Developing and orchestrating a detailed road map that promotes CDI ongoing growth and development is not as daunting a task as one may assume. First begin by understanding and appreciating what the medical record stands for, that is a communication tool for patient care. I prefer to quote the following from the Annals of Internal Medicine January 13, 2015 edition article titled Clinical Documentation in the 21st Century: Executive Summary of a Policy Position Paper From the American College of Physicians:

- The primary purpose of clinical documentation should be to support patient care and improve clinical outcomes through enhanced communication.
- The primary goal of EHR-generated documentation should be concise, history-rich notes that reflect the information gathered and are used to develop an impression, a diagnostic and/or treatment plan, and recommended follow-up.
- The clinical record should include the patient's story in as much detail as is required to retell the story.
- The medical record was first used by physicians to record their findings and actions and as a vehicle to communicate with other physicians who might care for the patient in the future.

Let's begin by realizing the need to step away from the notion that the medical record is a reimbursement tool to which the CDI has been assigned a narrowly defined task of searching for diagnoses that impact reimbursement. Instead we must approach the record for what it stands for, communication of patient care. In doing so, we can develop a roadmap to guide our ongoing growth and development in acquiring the knowledge and understanding of what makes up and constitutes solid and complete documentation. To get started, I highly recommend the textbook Bates' Guide to Physical Examination and History Taking by Lynn S. Bickley, a rich resource for learning about the necessary elements of a History and Physical. The History and Physical is the first document CDI should be focusing upon for improvement in quality and completeness in the record given that the H& P and one main component the History of Present Illness serves as the prism for which medical necessity is established for admission to the hospital. After all, without sufficient establishment and justification of medical necessity for hospital level of care, capture of all relevant diagnoses recorded in the record serves virtually little purpose.

Closing Words.....

In the March Newsletter, I will provide a detailed account of suggested steps to develop your own personal roadmap for career growth and development in the CDI industry. Please stay tuned and feel free to email me with any ideas or comments, Glenn.Krauss@Core-CDI.com