Opportunities in Health Information Management

Why Health Information Management?
Accounting for nearly one in seven jobs,¹ health care has an undeniably strong presence in the Lower Hudson Valley. It is both vast and expanding. In fact, health care jobs are projected to grow by 25 percent through 2022.² While many disciplines within health care present middle-skill opportunities, health information management (HIM) jobs best satisfy the criteria for New Skills at Work.

Hiring demand is strong and appears to have outpaced the supply of workforce and educational programming. The field continues to grow as health care providers increasingly rely on Electronic Health Records (EHR) and related information systems, and as New York State and the federal government expand reporting requirements.

What is Health Information Management?
People who work in this field manage the data produced over the course of providing health care. Specifically, they:

- Collect, organize, store, retrieve and analyze health information
- Keep information private and secure
- Assure data quality
- Use patient data for billing and revenue management
- Make sure that information is available in the right place and at the right time to support health and health care, in a new trend known as “Information Governance”

This field has jobs at all levels, from entry-level administrative jobs in health care that can lead to jobs in health information management or revenue management all the way to high-level jobs directing health information departments, performing sophisticated health analytics, and making sure that information is trustworthy and actionable. There are also many jobs in the middle. This is a field where experience is essential to getting ahead.

Where are the health information management jobs?
Entry-level administrative jobs in health care are in hospitals, clinics, doctors’ and dentists’ offices, health insurance companies, and government offices. These entry-level jobs can lead to jobs in health information management (HIM), medical office management or revenue management.

Most jobs in HIM that are mid-level and higher are in hospitals and with health information vendors, but they can also be found in other health care settings.

What do employers want?
Entry-level administrative jobs in health care, which can lead to jobs in health information management, require at least a high school diploma or its equivalent. Employers prefer:

- Customer service experience
- Strong written and verbal communication skills
- Knowledge of medical terminology
- Knowledge of third-party billing
- Excellent organizational skills
- Clerical skills
- Competency with document imaging (scanning), word processing, spreadsheet, database, scheduling, communications and presentation applications

Acknowledging the diversity of the region, some employers want people who are bilingual English/Spanish or English/Mandarin/Cantonese.

While there are many job openings for entry-level administrative jobs in health care, employers are reasonably selective in hiring. They are most concerned with customer service skills. Some workers in this field have backgrounds in hospitality where they have demonstrated their interpersonal skills.

At the middle level, people begin to specialize in either HIM operations or coding, or they may move into jobs outside the HIM department, such as revenue cycle management or other functions.

These jobs often require an industry-recognized credential or an associate degree. Although this varies with the exact job, employers often prefer:

- Knowledge of medical terminology, and ICD-9/10, CPT-4, Encoder

¹ New York State Department of Labor Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, 2014.
Knowledge of payer guidelines, including insurance carrier billing requirements and federal Medicare/Medicaid billing guidelines

Knowledge of HIPAA

Some familiarity with accounting programs such as QuickBooks and Excel

Knowledge of anatomy, physiology, and disease processes

Excellent written and verbal communication skills

Strong analytical skills

Experience with Electronic Health Records (EHR) and/or billing systems

One to two years of relevant experience

While a number of educational institutions offer programs called “medical billing and coding,” it is important to note that within the field, medical billing or coding are distinct functions. Some educational institutions are beginning to revamp their offerings to reflect this change in the field. Experts emphasize that a certification recognized and valued in the industry is essential to landing entry-level work as a coder. The main certifications mentioned were AHIMA’s CCA and AAPC’s CPC for outpatient or Emergency Department coding jobs and AHIMA’s CCS for inpatient coding positions. A school certificate of completion is not enough. Cancer Registrars must have an associate degree and be Certified Tumor Registrars.

Practical experience also makes candidates highly marketable, and this is often challenging to achieve in the

HEALTH INFORMATION MANAGEMENT JOBS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Min. Education</th>
<th>Certification</th>
<th>Yrs of Experience</th>
<th>Median Salary*</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medical Secretary</td>
<td>HS + Trng</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>0–1</td>
<td>31K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Information Management (HIM)</td>
<td>HS + Trng</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>0–1</td>
<td>35K</td>
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<tr>
<td>Birth Registrar</td>
<td>HS + Trng</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>0–1</td>
<td>32K</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patient Registrar</td>
<td>HS + Trng</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>0–1</td>
<td>34K</td>
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<tr>
<td>Medical Biller</td>
<td>HS + Trng</td>
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<td>0–1</td>
<td>37K</td>
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<tr>
<td>Release of Information Specialist</td>
<td>HS + Trng</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>1–2</td>
<td>29K</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outpatient Coder</td>
<td>HS + Trng</td>
<td>CCA or CPC required</td>
<td>1–2</td>
<td>40K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billing Coordinator</td>
<td>HS, Associate preferred</td>
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<td>2–3</td>
<td>42K</td>
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<tr>
<td>Medical Records Analyst</td>
<td>Associate</td>
<td>RHIT preferred</td>
<td>1–2</td>
<td>42K</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inpatient Coder</td>
<td>HS + Trng or Associate</td>
<td>CCS required</td>
<td>2–3</td>
<td>46K</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cancer Registrar</td>
<td>Associate</td>
<td>CTR required</td>
<td>2–3</td>
<td>48K</td>
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<tr>
<td>HIM Supervisor</td>
<td>Associate</td>
<td>RH/IT/RHIA preferred</td>
<td>2–3</td>
<td>50K</td>
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<td>HIM Manager</td>
<td>Associate</td>
<td>RH/IT/RHIA preferred</td>
<td>3–5</td>
<td>51K</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coding Supervisor</td>
<td>HS + Trng</td>
<td>CCS</td>
<td>2–5</td>
<td>57K</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manager of Specialized Cancer Programs</td>
<td>Associate</td>
<td>CTR required</td>
<td>3–5</td>
<td>65K</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coding Compliance Specialist/DRG Validator</td>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>CCS</td>
<td>3–8</td>
<td>65K</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clinical Documentation Improvement Specialist</td>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>CCDS or CDIP, sometimes RN</td>
<td>3–5</td>
<td>75K</td>
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</table>

HEALTH INFORMATION CERTIFICATIONS

Coding

The American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA)’s Certified Coding Associate (CCA) and AAPC (formerly known as American Academy of Professional Coders)’s Certified Professional Coder (CPC) are entry-level certifications and are helpful in getting a job in a doctor’s office, outpatient facility, or hospital Emergency Department.

AHIMA’s Certified Coding Specialist (CCS) is a more demanding certification that is needed to be an inpatient coder in a hospital. This is considered the “gold standard” coding credential.

Health Information Management

- AHIMA’s Registered Health Information Technician (RHIT) is required for most mid-to-high level jobs. It requires an associate degree from a program that is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Health Informatics and Information Management Education (CAHIIM) and passing an exam.
- AHIMA’s Registered Health Information Administrator (RHIA) is required for most high-level jobs. It requires a bachelor’s degree from a CAHIIM-accredited program and passing an exam.

Certified Tumor Registrar

This credential is awarded by the National Cancer Registrars Association. It requires both an associate degree and experience. The amount of experience needed depends on the associate degree major.

Clinical Documentation

- The Association of Clinical Documentation Improvement Specialists (ACDIS) has a Certified Clinical Documentation Specialist (CCDS) Credential, which has education and experience requirements.
- AHIMA has a Clinical Documentation Improvement Practitioner (CDIP) certification that has experience and education requirements.

*Median salary was supplied by Payscale.com and represents self-reported earnings in Westchester County, New York.
opportunities in Health Information Management. To address this issue, AHIMA has developed VLab (Virtual Lab), an Internet-based simulated work environment that colleges can subscribe to.

**Middle- to high-skill** jobs in the field usually require either an associate degree or a bachelor’s degree and two or more years of experience. Employers strongly prefer an industry-recognized certification such as AHIMA’s RHIT (associate level) or RHIA (bachelor’s level). Depending on the exact job, employers often want:

- Extensive experience with Electronic Health Records, Encoder software and hospital billing systems
- Knowledge of health information privacy laws (i.e., HIPAA) and state regulations
- Good interpersonal, written, and verbal skills
- Excellent problem-solving and analytical skills
- Ability to work independently and maintain relationships with personnel at all levels within and outside of the organization
- Supervisory skills

It is important to note that there is a demand for people with the RHIT credential, but there is no classroom-based accredited associate degree program in the Lower Hudson Valley that leads to it. The nearest program is at CUNY’s Borough of Manhattan Community College in New York City. Several private universities also offer RHIT programs online.

**Health Information Career Paths**

**Careers in Coding**  Coders grow more valuable to employers as they gain expertise, especially in complex coding environments. Coding must be accurate in order for health care providers to secure payment for their services. This career path progresses from simple to complex coding jobs, and then to other types of review, supervisory, and compliance positions.

**Careers in HIM Operations, or managing medical records.** These jobs do not involve coding, but do require knowledge of how health data is maintained and used. The RHIT certification is generally required for advancement to supervisory and management positions.

**Outside the HIM Department or outside a health care service provider** These may include careers related to billing and revenue management, jobs with an outside contractor (such as those that handle release of information), jobs with a health information vendor, jobs in data analytics, and others.

**HEALTH INFORMATION MANAGEMENT CAREER PATHS**

Pay figures reflect median wages, which were supplied by Payscale.com and represent self-reported earnings in Westchester County, New York.