



HEAL Coalition ALERT: Revisions to Medical Coding Laws May Impact Your Institution and Students

Legislation currently before Congress relating to the promotion of health information technology may have a significant impact on many allied health programs. A health IT bill (HR 4157) marked up before the House Ways and Means Committee in June provided a 2009 deadline for nationwide conversion to the latest version of the International Classification of Diseases. This tenth and latest version (ICD-10) would expand from 24,000 to more than 200,000 the number of billing and procedure codes used by physicians' offices and health insurance companies nationwide.

While the House Ways and Means Committee included a hard deadline in its health IT legislation, the House Energy and Commerce Committee did not. Members and staff on the Energy and Commerce Committee heard concerns, primarily from the health insurance community, that their technological support platforms would not be ready – nor their staff properly trained – to meet a 2009 timeline for full implementation.

The differences between the Ways and Means and Energy and Commerce bills have yet to be resolved; however, it is entirely possible that Congress will end up passing a final version of health IT legislation yet this year. These ongoing developments raise several substantive concerns for allied health schools who have programs relating to medical billing and coding assistants:

- 1) Do schools currently have the technical and educational capacities to properly train students in the ICD-10 standard? If not, how much time and resources will be necessary for schools to adjust their programs as part of this conversion?
- 2) Will certificates and diploma programs designed for the previous (ICD-9) standard become essentially irrelevant once the new standard is implemented? If so, what will be the impact on schools as well as their current (and recently graduated) students?
- 3) Do the greater number of billing codes in the ICD-10 standard – and the technical skills required to analyze and process them – warrant a longer, more intensive curricular program?
- 4) Will the change in standards – along with more widespread adoption of health IT in provider offices, and interoperability among health records – impact employment opportunities in this field? If so, how should schools adapt their curriculum and/or placement programs to

ensure their students have meaningful and fruitful employment opportunities in the years ahead?

If this issue is important to your institution and students, please consider joining the HEAL Coalition today and together we can influence the future of this legislation in Congress.

If you are interested in joining us, or would like more information regarding the HEAL Coalition, contact Executive Director Tom Netting at (202) 626-8553.