



HEAL Coalition ALERT: Medical Coding and Billing Legislation May Impact Your Institution

If your school currently offers medical billing and coding programs, legislation currently before Congress relating to the promotion of health information technology may have a significant impact on your institution. 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.

Obviously, a nearly tenfold expansion in the ICD classification system will have major ramifications on an institution's medical and billing coding programs – potentially affecting everything from the length and type of program offered to the materials incorporated into a curriculum to the types of employment opportunities open to program graduates.

As Congress has considered the health IT bill, the health insurance community has raised concerns that their technological support platforms would not be ready – nor their staff properly trained – to meet a 2009 timeline for full implementation. But the interests and concerns of the many allied health schools who train employees for the insurance industry have largely gone unnoticed.

While the ultimate outcome regarding an ICD-10 deadline has yet to be decided, it is entirely possible that Congress will produce a final health IT bill (with or without the deadline included) later this year. As a result, the Higher Education Allied Health Leaders (HEAL) Coalition believes that Congress must be educated on the impact which a hard ICD-10 deadline will have on the thousands of students enrolled in billing and coding assistant courses each year, and the institutions which provide these important programs.

If this issue concerns you, please join the HEAL Coalition today and together we can work to educate Congress on the impact these revisions will have on students!

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.