

Opportunities and Challenges for the Clinical Documentation Sector

The Clinical Documentation Sector protects the accuracy of patient histories, safeguards their privacy between systems and providers, and enhances and streamlines the adoption of Electronic Health Records (EHRs)

- As the Association for Healthcare Documentation Integrity (AHDI) and Clinical Documentation Industry Association (CDIA), our goals, visions, and missions reflect the critical nature of what we do for patients, their families, doctors, other health providers and the health care system as a whole.
- AHDI and CDIA are committed to the integrity, accuracy, completeness and safety of each patient's records as they make their way from nurse, to doctor, to technician, to surgeon, to clinic, to provider, or any combination thereof.
- We are poised to take advantage of the opportunities for growth and expansion of our sector that the quick evolution to Electronic Health Records (EHRs) envisioned in the Health Information for Economic and Clinical Health Act (HI TECH Act) has created.
- As we take advantage of these new opportunities, healthcare documentation professionals have and will remain steadfastly committed to our number one goal: **ensuring the accuracy, consistency, and security of patient health records.**
- And the adoption of new technologies for health data capture, formatting, and safe transfer have greatly contributed to the evolution of the clinical documentation industry and to the adoption of accurate EHRs.
- By adopting these technologies, our sector has positioned itself to serve as an accelerator of EHR adoption, as envisioned by the recently enacted HITECH Act.
- New technologies, including EHR systems, data exchange platforms, and speech recognition systems, offer an increasingly broad range of ways to capture patient health information and allow that information to be shared more efficiently and securely than ever before.
- These tremendous opportunities, coupled with growing economic pressures, bring some real challenges for the sector as well.

Current challenges can be mitigated by public-private partnerships that focus on renewed investments in technology acquisition for small businesses, and workforce training which would lead to expansive job creation opportunities.

- Economic pressures have made it difficult for our sector to acquire enabling technologies or to invest in innovative developments of them. It has also been difficult to develop the workforce necessary to fully meet the quickly evolving clinical documentation needs of physicians and healthcare enterprises.
- Declining revenues have prevented a reinvestment in technology and human capital, and has challenged the ability of the sector to meet the rapidly changing clinical documentation needs of physicians and healthcare enterprises.

- Government funding for technology acquisition and workforce development will enhance the ability of MTSOs to fulfill the documentation support needs of physicians in the age of EHRs. This will increase physician productivity, allowing them to focus on better patient care and assist them with a smoother operational transition to EHRs.
- New job creation is an essential component of the HITECH Act. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment of medical transcriptionists is projected to grow 14 percent from 2006 to 2016, faster than average for all occupations.¹ Demand for medical transcription services will grow as the result of an aging population and individuals living longer with chronic diseases.
- By supporting the sector in the areas of technology acquisition and workforce development, the federal government will be making a wise investment in the country's health information system, one which will pay dividends in the form of safe and efficient EHR adoption as well as much-needed job creation.

Structured narratives, provided by our Healthcare Documentation Professionals, are the preferred method for the majority of physicians nationwide, as it provides accuracy for the patient and time efficiencies for the doctors

- The clinical documentation industry and specifically, the dictation-transcription process which provides the structured narratives, has historically been and continues to be the documentation method of choice for physicians because it produces a comprehensive, specific narrative that allows for the accurate capture of patient history as well as the care encounter.
- It also allows for doctors to remain focused on seeing and serving patients as opposed to becoming data-entry clerks.
- Physicians may spend upwards of two to three hours a day entering data into some of the current EHR templates that do not allow for structured narratives. This is both time consuming and does not allow for the best accuracy in the patients' histories.
- Health data that is captured without quality assurance measures will inevitably result in patient data errors that are perpetuated in the record, thereby potentially compromising continuity of care, clinical decision-making, reimbursement, as well as more time spent by physicians entering and re-entering data and not with their patients.

While technology rapidly changes, the need for accurate, complete and consistent patient health records remains. MTSOs and clinical documentation professionals have long filled that need. With expanded opportunities for technology acquisition and workforce development, we will be well positioned to continue to do so. By integrating people and technology, WE can help fulfill the promise and potential of EHRs to improve the quality of the American health care system.

¹ United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2008-09 Edition.