



# *How to Get Started in the Lucrative Medical Coding Field*

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## About CodingCertification.Org

[CodingCertification.Org](http://CodingCertification.Org) is owned and managed by Laureen Jandroep, CPC, CPC-I who is also Sr. Instructor. The mission of CodingCertification.Org is to help new and seasoned coders with their certification education – first to get certified then to maintain certification.

This is done via articles, videos and practice questions many of which are freely available throughout the site. Some are paid products like our popular Coding Certification Review Blitz and CEU Webinars and Physician Based Coding Course. We have a new discussion board where aspiring coders can ask their questions about getting certified and one where certified coders can discuss ways they've maintained their CEUs for their respective credential.

## About Laureen Jandroep CPC, CPC-I, CMSCS, CHCI

Laureen has over 20 years in the healthcare field. She graduated as an Occupational Therapist in 2006 and before long was running a successful therapy practice which did over 1.6 million in billing per year with a less than .06% rejection rate. Once Medicare changed how rehab companies were reimbursed this business was closed and Laureen eventually started a new company dedicated to teaching Medical Billing and Coding. This business was eventually sold and is now run by the AAPC as part of their online course offerings.

Currently Laureen works full time for CodeRyte, Inc. as a Coding Analyst and on the side teaches medical coding through her company CodingCertification.Org.

She founded the Southern Jersey Chapter of the AAPC and also served on the AAPC National Advisory board from 2003 – 2006 in addition to being a consulting editor for several "Coding Alert" publications for the Coding Institute.

Laureen lives in southern New Jersey with her husband of 20+ years, Anthony, and four young children. They are active foster parents and spend most of their free time these days just being parents which they love.

[www.codingcertification.org](http://www.codingcertification.org) – Find CCO's blog posts, resource pages, Community Forum for Medical Coding and Discussion, products, [testimonials here](#). Also learn about free monthly Q & A Webinars and find free coding tools and downloads, plus sign up for our monthly newsletter.

[www.codingcertification.org/forum](http://www.codingcertification.org/forum) – Forum where you can discuss and ask questions about medical coding and reimbursement, getting certified, staying certified, and more.

<http://www.facebook.com/CodingCertification> - Tips, links to articles, announcements, contests, and fun stuff for medical coders and medical coding students.

## **WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF MEDICAL CODING**

Seen commercials about medical coding schools and wonder if the profession is right for you? With the field expected to grow faster than other occupations, now is the time to consider a future in medical coding. There is a national shortage of certified medical coders in healthcare facilities, hospitals and doctor's offices. Qualified medical coders can even choose to work their own hours from home. Add computer skills, and there are plenty of high paying opportunities for those willing to hit the books.

## **YOUR POTENTIAL AS A MEDICAL CODER**

Medical Coding Salary is above average with steady employment. Coding specialist analyzes health records and designates the codes for each procedure and diagnosis. It is one of the few health professions where you do not have to work directly with the patient. Instead, medical coders work with patient records. Coders sort through the medical records to identify services and their corresponding diagnoses documented by the physicians and report those qualifying for healthcare reimbursement. This information is then inputted into a software program they maintain. They also do administrative work such as scheduling, staffing and adding or decreasing healthcare services.

Quality standards and productivity are required to be a top earning medical coder. For this reason, it pays to be detail oriented, accurate and organized. Besides good time management, it is important to be an active listener. Coders work with a team of professionals and must be comfortable asking questions and with memos and other forms of office communication. Taking biology and computer courses in high school are a good start. Because a medical coder has to understand what is written in medical records, learning medical terminology, physiology, pharmacology, and anatomy is necessary. You have to learn updated knowledge in the field continually, so life-long learning is required.

Medical coding salaries vary by experience and where you work. For example, a doctor with a solo practice may only pay in the low to mid 30's. Working for a government facility or directly for the insurance company brings in the \$40,000 range. A high paid medical coding consultant can bring home nearly \$60,000 a year. For, the amount of schooling needed to enter the profession; medical coders make a good living in a comfortable office environment.

Earning a medical coder salary starts with education. There are a couple of ways to go depending on your goals. There are four-year university programs, associate degree programs, online boot camp courses and vocational classes available. Those who take the shorter diploma programs typically receive comparable training to a college degree in the field. The goal is to acquire enough knowledge to pass the medical coding certification exam.

The abundance of paperwork required to file insurance claims keeps medical coders in high demand. Changing government regulations and the lack of qualified applicants translates into many job opportunities. Earning an impressive medical coding salary is just a few steps away.

## **IS MEDICAL CODING SCHOOL RIGHT FOR YOU?**

To be a medical coder you must have a handle on a variety of topics. The background knowledge is needed to understand the human body, symptoms and diagnoses. Since the main point of coding is getting payment, learning how an insurance claim works along with the basic third party reimbursement is crucial. For this reason, a solid education includes: medical terminology, health data requirements, anatomy and physiology, coding systems, data analysis as well as healthcare reimbursement methods.

Are you good match for this growing field? People who enjoyed science in high school work well in the healthcare field. Because accuracy is essential, medical coders must have an attention for detail. The fast pace is perfect for people who like to keep busy, but also means time management and organization is key. Since medical coders work in a team being an active listener and a clear communicator is also important. If this sounds like you, medical coding school will set you on the path to make from \$25,000 to near \$60,000 a year.

The government does not have a set standard of education needed to become a medical coder. There is a variety of schooling options to get you started in the field. There are than 200 schools across the country offering an associates or bachelor's degree in health information management. Though this route is a longer process, it can give you a leg up when landing the most lucrative jobs. Certificate programs, often less costly, are also designed to deliver the knowledge needed to pass certification. The vocational route is offered at community colleges, state vocation-tech centers and even private boot camp seminars to get you job ready. Online medical coding school is a convenient option that offers the same material with flexibility and cheaper tuition costs.

No matter which route works for you, there are a couple things to checkout to ensure you enroll in a legitimate program. The school should clearly provide the curriculum of courses and topics that are covered. Consultation time with teachers should be available to offer feedback and instruction when needed. They should also stand behind your results with established placement programs and resources to help you find a job. Check to see if the coursework will help prepare you to sit for the American Academy of Professional Coders (AAPC) or the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) credentialing exam. If the online route suites you best, at a minimum, check the physical address and make certain a live person answers the phone.

Employment for medical coders is expected to grow faster than average through 2014 According to the Occupational Outlook Handbook. The question is, are you ready to be in demand?

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A MEDICAL CODING PROGRAM

When looking for a medical coding program, there are hundreds of options to choose from. They span from bachelor to associate programs, certificates and diplomas offered online. One option for distant learning is CodingCertification.Org Physician Based Medical Coding Online Course.



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With all the different names and program lengths, how do you know which one to choose? The best way to decide is by being able to tell which one will give you the tools needed to pass the certification test and land the most lucrative jobs.

The American Academy of Professional Coders (AAPC) and the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) are the recognized source for medical coding certification in the medical community. Both offer the most popular credentials. AAPC offers the Certified Professional Coder (CPC) credential which focuses on coding used in patient settings like emergency rooms and doctor's offices. The AHIMA offers Certified Coding Specialist (CCS) credential for those interested in hospital and in-patient coding. Since employers are confident hiring applicants who are CPC or CCS certified, you should pick a program that will prepare you to pass the exam.

It is possible to start working as a medical coder without first passing the certification test. For example, you might work as a receptionist at a doctor's office and learn coding as part of your job

responsibilities. Experience alone is enough to work in the field and eventually pass the exam with a few supplemental courses. Most people do not have access to this information and will have to find a medical coding program to pick up the information.

Whether a traditional Associate degree, distance learning course (such as the CodingCertification.Org's [Physician Based Medical Coding](#) Online Course), a consultant boot camp, the program should have the following course types to prepare you to sit for either the CPC or CCS exam:

Coding Classes- There should be a variety of coding sets covered teaching the principles of the primary codes including CPT, HCPCS Level II, and ICD-9-CM. Advanced coding for payment system and outpatient services is a plus. The titles of the classes will vary, but should teach how to identify the physician's diagnosis by practicing coding patient medical records.

- Introduction to Health Care Records- This course will teach you how to read hospital charts and give background information on medical record keepers, and billing and coding organizations.
- Health Information Management- Shows where health information comes from and how it is used including how to compile, number, file and store the information.
- Medical Terminology- The course studies medical terminology through anatomy, physiology, pharmacology, laboratory, terms and abbreviations.
- Fundamentals of Medical Science- The class outlines diagnoses, surgical procedures, signs and symptoms, medical equipment, to help understand current procedures and therapies.
- Health Statistics and Registration- A review of the collection of data, common computations, and how to present and report data.
- Computers in Health Science- Topics teach how to use computers for database management, to make spreadsheets, to manipulate graphs in addition to other computer skills needed with health information management.
- Professional Seminar- A class that reviews professional conduct and the important topic of how to make a resume and conduct interviews, to help with finding employment.

A medical school program that teaches you practical material is what you need to get started in the field. Focus on absorbing the information so you can apply for a job straight away. Employers will give you a test, to see if you can apply what you learned. Or you can sit for the exam straight

away. It doesn't matter what form of schooling you chose, you receive the same certificate once you pass the exam. Certifications in hand, you now have what you need to be a top earner in a stable healthcare career.

## PRODUCTS TO FURTHER HELP YOU PREPARE FOR YOUR EXAM

To help you prepare for your CPT or CCS exam, CodingCertification.Org offers the Medical Coding Certification Review Blitz Video Series, nicknamed the [Blitz Videos](#). These videos include 9.5 hours of CPC® Exam Review and Exam Tips.



- Certified Professional Coder (CPC®) exam by the AAPC and the
- Certified Coding Specialist-Physician Based (CCS-P) exam by the American Health Information Association (AHIMA).

This is both a review of the subject matter and a guide to doing well on the exam. You will not only have an exhaustive review of all the various diagnostic and therapeutic procedures covered on the exam, the program will also demonstrate ways to go through the process of taking the exam in the most efficient manner, making best use of the time allowed. Since this is an open-book exam, the program teaches you my proprietary "bubbling and highlighting technique." This technique demonstrates how to mark and highlight your coding manual to make it easier to choose the correct answer of the choices given for any question on the exam. You'll see how to best manage some questions you might find more difficult than others.

[\[Read more...\]](#)



If you need extra help understanding a particular Medical Coding concept, perhaps you would like to purchase a one hour session with Laureen Jandroep, CPC, CPC-I, Senior Instructor at CodingCertification.Org. This is included in the [Blitz Video Package](#) but can also be purchased separately.



Another superb idea, to help you prepare for the CPC Certification Exam is to purchase practice exams. For example, CodingCertification.Org offers a [150 Question Practice Exam](#) which includes:

- 150 Question CPC Practice Exam
- Answer Key, With Full Rationale
- Scan Tron Bubble Sheets
- The Exam Study Guide, including:
  - Common Anatomy Terminology Handouts
  - Common Medical Terminology Prefix, Root Word, and Suffix Handouts
- The Official AAPC Proctor-to-Examinee Instructions (read out loud on the day of the CPC exam)

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## WHAT YOU CAN DO WITH MEDICAL CODING AND BILLING CERTIFICATION

Medical coding and billing certification is your ticket to one of the fastest growing professions in healthcare. Medical coding and billing specialists apply the correct codes to patient diagnosis and medical procedures. This data is then used to make bills and submit claims to Medicare, Blue Cross and other insurance companies. Without the medical coding and billing specialist filling out insurance forms the doctor's office or other service provider does not get paid for their services. There is an industry wide demand for qualified medical billing and coding specialists. Certification almost guarantees a long lucrative career in health care administration.

### **There are several reputable professional associations offering certification programs.**

- American Association of Medical Billers (AAMB) – The AAMB basic certification is the Certified Medical Billing Specialist (CMBS) certification. It is an introductory billing and coding exam that tests medical terminology, medical office insurance, insurance carriers, ICD coding, Medicare, CPT coding, and fraud and abuse knowledge. The AAMB also offers a specialized CMBS-H certification covering inpatient and outpatient hospital billing. An advanced CMBS-CA certification is also available to prove competency in chiropractic billing and coding.
  
- American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) - The AHIMA has one of the most popular medical coding and billing certifications. They offer the nationally recognized Certified Coding Specialist (CCS) credential focusing on hospital inpatient coding.

•American Association of Healthcare Administrative Management (AAHAM) – Formerly known as the American Guild of Patient Account Management, AAHAM offers several professional certifications. The Certified Patient Account Technician (CPAT) designed for the hospital side of patient accounting and the Certified Clinic Account Technician (CCAT) for the clinical or physician side of coding.

•The American Academy of Professional Coders (AAPC) - The Certified Procedural Coder (CPC) represents the highest standard in physician office coding and billing. Coders with the CPC certification are said to make 20% more than their counterparts.

Although it is not necessary to have a medical coding and billing certification to work, credentials will make you highly sought after in the job market. A vocational program or online course can help you prepare for the exam. Expect to know medical terminology in human anatomy and physiology. Also, have an understanding of third party reimbursement and the insurance claim process. You must also have a firm grasp of the basic ICD-9-CM, CPT and HCPCS Level II code sets. Distance learning classes and online courses, such as CodingCertification.Org [Physician Based Medical Coding](#) Online Course, are also viable options to quickly get up to speed. For extra help, a multitude of study guides and books are available to help prepare you for examination. A medical coding and billing certification is the cornerstone to a new career, for anyone willing to learn a new skill set.



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## ARE YOU READY FOR A MEDICAL CODING JOB FROM HOME?

**You Must have discipline and great organization skills.**

**If you get the opportunity to work from home, it can be a pretty good situation for work and family.**

A medical coding job from home can be a dream situation. You can set your own hours and finish your work without anyone breathing down your neck. By staying home, you save money on transportation costs and childcare. Not to mention the tax write-offs for your home office. Working medical coding at home also means you can increase your volume to make more money and enjoy more variety in your work than working on location.

A medical coder is needed to record data accurately for other healthcare professionals. A successful work-at-home career in the field is more than just assigning codes. You also prepare paper and electronic claims and issue them to the insurance companies. Software programs are used to enter patient information and post payments. Regular clerical duties such as mailing patient statements are also part of routine responsibilities.

There are a couple ways to have a medical coding job from home. One is finding a position that allows employees to work remotely or contract with an outsource company. In most cases, you can sign up for more than one service to keep work consistent. By going this route you may still qualify for the companies 401k, healthcare and other benefits found at a traditional brick and mortar job. Another way to work at home is being your own boss and start your own medical coding business. Going this route you contract with single physician offices and offer to do their billing and coding.

**To make the most money you have to be qualified. Most remote coding jobs require either a CCS or CPC certification, or a few years of experience.** With all of the medical coding programs available, passing a certification test is a simple part of the process. The main obstacle is getting the experience when first getting started. By taking a lower position as a reception, you can receive on the job training to get your coding experience before acquiring an actual coding job. Once you have the experience under your belt, you can confidently apply for remote positions. If starting your own business, consider taking specialized certifications to establish a niche. You will be able to acquire more clients and earn top dollar.

### TAKING ACTION

Whichever route you chose for a medical coding job from home, keep a few things in mind. Having flexibility and no one telling you what to do can be a blessing and a curse. It takes

discipline to work from home. This can be difficult with personal distractions like children and telephone calls. Besides separating work and home life, you are also responsible for budgeting, bringing in new work and tracking the receipts for all those tax write-offs. If you are able to do everything above, working from home as a qualified medical coder may be right for you. For more help starting your medical coding business consult one of the many at home courses available online.

*CodingCertification.Org makes no guarantees with job placement either from a home office or Brick and Mortar business.*

*We provide products, tools and proprietary teaching methods to give our students the best possible chance at passing the CPC exam.*