

An Open Letter to Healthcare Documentation Professionals *On behalf of AHDI*

What does the future hold for medical transcriptionists, medical editors, and the healthcare documentation profession? Quite honestly, that depends on *us*. It depends on our knowledge and understanding of the ever-changing technologic landscape of the healthcare industry and our ability to adapt to these changes. It depends on our preparedness for emerging technologies and capacity to use standardized vocabularies that will form the basis of uniformly structured and coded documents. Frankly, it depends on our profession staying focused on evolving our craft, becoming more visible on the healthcare team as the “go-to” experts in clinical documentation, and working together to prepare ourselves for future roles in the healthcare industry. We may be unable to directly control the evolution of the healthcare industry and its enabling technologies, but we can ensure our future by adapting to it.

The purpose of this letter is two-fold. First, we want to promote AHDI priorities and how they require involvement by the profession. These priorities address the changing healthcare landscape in positioning our profession not only to remain relevant but also to be considered a value-add service to patient care delivery. Secondly, whether you’re a member of AHDI or not, we must all pull together at this defining moment in our profession’s history to help reset our direction in these changing times rather than waiting to have others set it for us. We believe AHDI members and nonmembers alike are part of the solution. You can support the future of your career and profession in many ways, along with the priorities of AHDI, and here are a few:

- **Educate yourself.** A solid educational background sustained by long-term continuing education is the cornerstone of our profession. We are medical language specialists – and that language is evolving and morphing exponentially along. The documentation sector is also being shaped by healthcare’s desire for more standardization and greater information specificity with the advent of health information exchanges and ICD-10 arriving in 2013. A good knowledge base is essential. Log onto the AHDI website and take advantage of the many continuing education opportunities we have to offer.
- **Get credentialed.** Professional credentialing demonstrates commitment to lifelong education and is necessary to earn the respect of those both within and outside of our profession. A professional credential demonstrates that like most every other professional on the healthcare delivery team, you are committed to life-long learning and have taken a competency-based national exam to validate your knowledge. We know that we are a critical contributor to patient safety, but without credentials that set us apart and distinguish our unique body of knowledge and contributions to the patient care team, our end-users will continue to believe that anyone can do this job and that our role can readily be replaced by point-and-click technologies and speech recognition engines.
- **Use authenticated research tools.** Many in our profession do not have adequate resources for the demanding jobs we hold. There are many resources available online. Some are very good, and some are not reliable or trustworthy, so Internet searching is often a gamble. The AHDI *Benchmark Knowledge Base*, with the third edition *Book of Style* embedded into it, is a one-stop, web-based solution to this problem and represents the profession’s next generation of authenticated literature to drive accuracy

and quality into the healthcare document in a quicker and more automated way. Traditional books are excellent, but you need to keep them up-to-date.

- **Embrace new technology.** The electronic healthcare record is coming, and in many places it is already here. It is an important and necessary development in healthcare documentation and patient safety. We must work toward the goal of a National Health Information Network because such a network of accessible, interoperable health information is a critical component of healthcare reform. Read the [Emerging Technologies Focus Group Findings and Conclusions](#) – a comprehensive report prepared from focus groups conducted with documentation professionals and technology vendors, and learn what they believe are the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for the field.
- **Get involved.** AHDI has a Facebook page – there is no cost, and you can find out more about what we are doing in support of hard-working healthcare documentation professionals. We discuss what is happening in healthcare and how staying connected, informed, and involved can keep us a step ahead of changes as they develop. Check us out [here](#).
- **Contribute to the Power of 10 Campaign.** AHDI is launching a year-long campaign to raise \$10 from 10,000 MTs by the end of 2010. Why? To support the association’s advocacy efforts in Washington, DC, where AHDI and MTIA are working hard to make sure you have a role in the future of the EHR. Our lobbying firm along with our government relations staff is making sure our sector is well represented in important meetings and discussions being held by our nation’s legislators and policymakers on healthcare reform, criteria and standards for EHR systems, and workforce development in allied health. All Power of 10 funds go directly to this effort. It will take every one of the “silent” ten thousand contributing their “voice” through support and participation. Find out more about [Power of 10](#).

While everyone around us is deciding our future relevance in healthcare, we must come together, as the true experts in our field, and work collaboratively to develop valuable and meaningful technology-enabled roles that assist in accelerating EHR adoption, healthcare reform, and improved clinical and reimbursement decision support through accurate, timely, and complete healthcare documentation. We can work together, as practitioners, educators, QA experts, compliance officers, managers, team leaders, and supervisors to shape a future for our profession and that contributes to improving the U.S. healthcare delivery system.

There are so many things you can do to build a better future for yourself. This letter outlines some of the many possibilities for positioning yourself to not only survive but *thrive* in the future of healthcare.

Which ones will *you* choose?

Association for Healthcare Documentation Integrity
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