Medical Billing, Coding, & Health Information Technician

WHAT I DO: I help health care providers get reimbursed for services given to their patients by collecting, organizing, coding, and maintaining patients’ medical information in paper and electronic systems.

My tasks can include:
- Gathering and organizing information for patients’ medical records
- Processing patient admission and discharge forms
- Reviewing patients’ medical records for completeness and accuracy, and making sure that they are secure/kept confidential
- Speaking with doctors, other health care workers, patients, and select family members to clarify billing information
- Entering information (such as a patient’s age, gender, history and extent of disease, and treatment) from medical records into computers
- Assigning a code to each diagnosis and procedure, using standard coding systems
- Compiling and maintaining records of patients who have certain health problems; analyzing data to provide research information
- Creating a filing and storage system to manage records and information
- Organizing and maintaining data for clinical databases and registries (such as organ donation registries)
- Assembling and analyzing patient data to help improve patient care or control costs
- Preparing medical records for release to authorized parties
- Billing insurance companies and preparing patients’ invoices

WHAT MAKES MY JOB HOT?

Short-term training:
- To get an entry-level job, you need a high school diploma or HSE and a certificate of completion from a training program. However, some technicians have an associate’s or higher degree. Many employers also require professional certification or the willingness to obtain it.

Faster than average growth:
- In New York City, this job is expected to grow 11% from 2010-2020.

Good pay & benefits (NYC, 2013):
- Typical entry pay: $32,990/yr.
- Median pay: $42,840/yr.
- Experienced pay: $50,100/yr.
- Benefits for full-time workers can include health and life insurance, paid vacation, sick leave, and a retirement plan.

My job is a good fit for you if you:
- like working with computers
- have good communication and people skills
- are detail-oriented and organized
- are patient and flexible/adaptable
- have good analytical/problem solving skills
- can stay calm in tense situations
- don’t mind performing somewhat repetitive tasks
- can work well independently and as part of a team

For more information:
Go to www.careeronestop.org and search for "Medical Records and Health Information Technicians"

Getting a Foot in the Door: What Employers are Looking For

Employers in the New York City Region include:
- Jacobi Medical Center
- North Central Bronx Hospital
- Lincoln Medical and Mental Health Center
- Montefiore Medical Center
- Mount Sinai Hospital
- Weill Cornell Medical College
- NYU Langone Medical Center
- Private doctors’ offices/medical practices

Major insurance carriers, skilled nursing facilities, urgent care centers, and select law firms

| Things to Consider When Applying for a Medical Billing, Coding, & Health Information Technician Job |
| Academic/ training & other credentials: |
| • Many New York City employers will hire entry-level medical billing, coding, and health information technicians with a certificate of completion from a training program. However, some prefer that job applicants have an associate’s degree. |
| • Many employers also require professional certification, which you can get from several organizations such as the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) and the American Academy of Professional Coders (AAPC). Some organizations base certification on passing an exam, while others require graduation from an accredited program. Many coding certifications require coding experience in a work setting. Once certified, technicians typically must renew their certification regularly and take continuing education courses. |
| Other employer requirements/ preferences may include: |
| • Background check. Demonstrated proficiency working with computers. |
| • Some employers will hire recent graduates for entry-level jobs, but others require or prefer some work experience (if you don’t have much work experience, see tip in below section). |
| Tips to help you prepare for, land, and succeed in a medical billing, coding, & health information career: |
| • Employers may also refer to me as a coder; medical coder; biller; medical biller; computerized medical billing associate; health information specialist/technician; or medical records coordinator/technician. |
| • Set to take effect in 2014, one of the new requirements of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) signed into law by President Obama in 2010 is that all physicians and medical facilities across the country provide their patients with electronic medical records (EMRs). As a result, many facilities are transitioning from paper medical records to electronic ones, and are training staff in how to use the new record-keeping system. The widespread use of electronic health records (EHRs) by all types of healthcare providers should lead to an increased need for technicians. As EHR systems continue to become more common, technicians with computer skills will be needed to use them. In addition, because the ACA will increase the number of people with health insurance in the US, the health care industry will need more technicians to manage their health records. |
| • Hospitals will employ the most technicians, but the majority of new jobs will likely be in doctors’ offices. Many new jobs are also expected in nursing homes and home health agencies. Or, if you are an entrepreneur (looking to start your own business / be self-employed), you can gradually start your own home-based billing service. |
| • You have a better chance of landing a job if you are professionally certified. Technicians with a strong background in medical coding will be in high demand. |
| • If you don’t have much work experience in the field, it is highly recommended that you volunteer as much as possible at a community health center or hospital, for example. Though you will not be paid for this work and your duties may be limited to things like filing records, treat it as a job so that you leave the employer with the best impression possible (you have great attendance and show up on time, you work hard and care about your work, you dress professionally, you are humble, etc.). This can help you to build up your résumé and to get a good recommendation from an employer who can vouch for you. |
| • Most technicians work full time, but there is some part-time work. In healthcare facilities that are open 24 hours a day, technicians may work evening or overnight shifts. This is one of the few health occupations in which there is no hands-on patient contact. |
| • Most technicians work in hospitals (state, local, or private), clinics, or physicians’ offices. Some work in nursing care facilities, or for home health care services, private billing and coding companies, or the government. |
| • Technicians usually sit for long periods of time at desks in office buildings or in the back offices of hospitals or clinics. Some work in small file rooms. They may spend many hours in front of computers so they must guard against eyestrain and muscle pain. |
| • Regardless of geography, hospitals and the government generally pay better for these jobs than doctors’ practices or extended care facilities. |

Skills & Abilities that Employers Typically Seek:
• Strong communication, customer service, and research skills, plus strong computer/keyboard skills (minimal amount of typing errors)
• Self-starter with organizational and time management skills
• Ability to multi-task, adapt to daily challenges, and work independently without a lot of supervision
• Professionalism and a high degree of ethical integrity (Medical records contain very private and sensitive patient information. A small slip of the tongue can get you into trouble and can cause serious problems for a patient. Think about it this way: How would you feel if a person told someone you barely know about a health problem you have that you’d rather keep private?)
• Sensitivity to patients’ circumstances and needs
• Ability to be assertive (but not aggressive) and to keep emotions in check in stressful situations
Getting a Credential that Can Help You Land a Job

Hostos Community College
Continuing Education & Workforce Development Department, Hostos Community College of CUNY
560 Exterior St. (East 149th St. between Exterior St. and River Ave.), Bronx, NY 10451
For more information, contact: Magdalena Ramirez at 718-518-6656 or maramirez@hostos.cuny.edu

Note: The program information below was collected in Sept. 2013; it is subject to change over time.

STEP 1: Learn about the program and make sure it's a good fit for your interests, goals, needs, and schedule.
- This 189-hour, 42-session program meets on Saturdays from 9:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Students are admitted into the program in the fall and spring semesters only (two times per year).
- It's recommended that you have a 9th-grade math level.
- When you successfully complete the program, you earn a Medical Billing and Coding Certificate from Hostos Community College and are prepared to take exams for national certification. Credentials you can earn by passing these exams include the Certified Coding Associate (CCA) credential and/or the Certified Coding Specialist (CCS) credential from the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA), and/or the Certified Professional Coder (CPC) credential from the American Academy of Professional Coders (AAPC).

STEP 2: Find out the cost of the program and make sure it's a good fit for your wallet.
- Tuition, Fees, & Other Costs: $2,253 for tuition, approximately $100 in fees, and approximately $1,000 for textbooks. Students must purchase textbooks before the start of each course.

STEP 3: Apply to Hostos's Division of Continuing Education & Workforce Development. You must submit proof of a high school diploma or HSE before the start of the second course.

CONGRATULATIONS – YOU'VE BEEN ACCEPTED INTO THE PROGRAM!

STEP 4: Successfully complete all program requirements. The program consists of the following seven courses:
- Medical Terminology
- Anatomy and Physiology
- Medical Billing for Private Practice
- Bookkeeping and Accounting for Private Practice
- Computerized Medical Billing
- ICD-9 CM Coding
- CPT-4 Coding

You must maintain a 70% or "C" grade average in each course or repeat the course at your own expense. You must also maintain at least 90% attendance (no more than one absence per course).

CONGRATULATIONS – YOU'VE EARNED A MEDICAL BILLING AND CODING CERTIFICATE FROM HOSTOS COMMUNITY COLLEGE!

STEP 5: It is highly recommended that you take the first in a series of national certification exams offered by organizations such as the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) (www.ahima.org) or the American Academy of Professional Coders (AAPC) (www.aapc.com). New York employers (especially hospitals) prefer that you be nationally certified.

STEP 6: Use your Hostos certificate (and your national certification, if you have it) to start working as an entry-level medical biller and/or coder and/or continue your studies. You can pursue higher credentials at Hostos Community College such as an Associate in Science (A.S.) Degree in Business Management or an Associate in Applied Science (A.A.S.) Degree in Accounting. Options at other CUNY colleges include: an Associate in Applied Science (A.A.S.) Degree in Health Information Technology at Borough of Manhattan Community College or Guttman Community College; a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) in Accounting, a Bachelor of Business Administration (B.B.A.), or a minor in Business and Liberal Arts (BALA) at Queens College; or a Bachelor of Science (B.S.) in Health Information Management (online degree) at CUNY's School of Professional Studies.

Additional Programs in the NYC Region that can Train You to Become a Medical Biller and/or Coder:
- New York City College of Technology (Division of Continuing Education): Certificate Program in Medical Billing and Coding Specialist (Brooklyn, 718-552-1170)
- Kingsborough Community College (Continuing Education): Certificate Program in Medical Billing/Coding Specialist (Brooklyn, 718-368-5050)
The sample career ladder below shows one way that you can move up in your career as a medical billing, coding, and health information technician. It illustrates how you can advance from an entry-level position to positions with higher levels of pay, skill, and responsibility. Regardless of the path you take, it really pays to move up!

Sample Career Ladder for a Medical Biller and/or Coder

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**STEP 1**
Entry-level Medical Biller and/or Coder

**STEP 2**
Billing and Coding Specialist

**STEP 3**
Team Leader

**STEP 4**
Billing, Coding, and Health Information Management Supervisor or Manager (typically has an associate's or higher degree)

**STEP 5**
Departmental Administrator (typically has a bachelor's or higher degree in health information management/administration or business)

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**Occupations Requiring Similar Skills / Job Duties that You Also May Want to Explore**
(Entry pay figures are based on New York State DOL data):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Typical education/training needed for an entry-level job</th>
<th>Typical annual entry pay in the NYC Region (2013)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pharmacy Technician</td>
<td>High school diploma/HSE and moderate-term on-the-job training</td>
<td>$24,420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payroll and Timekeeping Representative/Associate</td>
<td>High school diploma/HSE and moderate-term on-the-job training</td>
<td>$29,510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurance Claims and Policy Processing Representative/Associate</td>
<td>High school diploma/HSE and moderate-term on-the-job training</td>
<td>$30,300</td>
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</tbody>
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