Medical Records and Health Information Technicians

Significant Points

- Employment is expected to grow much faster than the average.

- Job prospects should be very good, particularly for technicians with strong computer software skills.

- Entrants usually have an associate degree.

- This is one of the few health-related occupations in which there is no direct hands-on patient care.

Nature of the Work

Medical records and health information technicians assemble patients' health information including medical history, symptoms, examination results, diagnostic tests, treatment methods, and all other healthcare provider services. Technicians organize and manage health information data by ensuring its quality, accuracy, accessibility, and security. They regularly communicate with physicians and other healthcare professionals to clarify diagnoses or to obtain additional information.

The increasing use of electronic health records (EHR) will continue to broaden and alter the job responsibilities of health information technicians. For example, with the use of EHRs, technicians must be familiar with EHR computer software, maintaining EHR security, and analyzing electronic data to improve healthcare information. Health information technicians use EHR software to maintain data on patient safety, patterns of disease, and disease treatment and outcome. Technicians also may assist with improving EHR software usability and may contribute to the development and maintenance of health information networks.

Medical records and health information technicians' duties vary with the size of the facility where they work. Technicians can specialize in many aspects of health information.

Some medical records and health information technicians specialize in codifying patients' medical information for reimbursement purposes. Technicians who specialize in coding are called medical coders or coding specialists. Medical coders assign a code to each diagnosis and procedure by using classification systems software. The classification system determines the amount for which healthcare providers will be reimbursed if the patient is covered by Medicare, Medicaid, or other insurance programs using the system. Coders may use several coding systems, such as those required for ambulatory settings, physician offices, or long-term care.

Medical records and health information technicians also may specialize in cancer registry. Cancer (or tumor) registrars maintain facility, regional, and national databases of cancer patients. Registrars review patient records and pathology reports, and assign codes for the diagnosis and treatment of different cancers and selected benign tumors. Registrars conduct annual follow-ups to track treatment, survival, and recovery. This information is used to calculate survivor rates and success rates of various types of treatment, to locate geographic areas with high incidences of certain cancers, and to identify potential participants for clinical drug trials.

Work environment. Medical records and health information technicians work in pleasant and comfortable offices. This is one of the few health-related occupations in which there is no direct hands-on patient care.

Medical records and health information technicians usually work a typical 40-hour week. Some overtime may be required. In health facilities that are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, technicians may work day, evening, and night shifts. About 14 percent of technicians worked part-time in 2008.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Entry-level medical records and health information technicians usually have an associate degree. Many employers favor technicians who have a Registered Health Information Technicians (RHIT) credential.

Education and training. Medical records and health information technicians generally have an associate degree. Typical coursework in health information technology includes medical terminology, anatomy and physiology, health data requirements and standards, clinical classification and coding systems, data analysis, health care reimbursement methods, database security and management, and quality improvement methods. Applicants can improve their chances of admission into a postsecondary program by taking biology, math, chemistry, health, and computer science courses in high school.

Certification and other qualifications. Most employers prefer to hire credentialed medical record and health information technicians. A number of organizations offer credentials typically based on passing a credentialing exam. Most credentialing programs require regular recertification and continuing education to maintain the credential. Many coding credentials require an amount of time in coding experience in the work setting.

The American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) offers credentialing as a Registered Health Information Technicians (RHIT). To obtain the RHIT credential, an individual must graduate from a 2-year associate degree program accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Health Informatics and Information Management Education (CAHIIM) and pass an AHIMA-administered written examination. In

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Projections data from the National Employment Matrix

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2008	Projected Employment, 2018	Change, 2008-2018	
				Number	Percent
Medical records and health information technicians	29-2071	172,500	207,600	35,100	20

(NOTE) Data in this table are rounded. See the discussion of the employment projections table in the *Handbook* introductory chapter on *Occupational Information Included in the Handbook.*

2008, there were more than 200 CAHIIM-accredited health information technology colleges and universities programs.

The American Academy of Professional Coders (AAPC) offers coding credentials. The Board of Medical Specialty Coding (BMSC) and Professional Association of Health care Coding Specialists (PAHCS) both offer credentialing in specialty coding. The National Cancer Registrars Association (NCRA) offers a credential as a Certified Tumor Registrar (CTR). To learn more about the credentials available and their specific requirements, contact the credentialing organization.

Health information technicians and coders should possess good oral and written communication skills as they often serve as liaisons between healthcare facilities, insurance companies, and other establishments. Candidates proficient with computer software and technology will be appealing to employers as healthcare facilities continue to adopt electronic health records. Medical records and health information technicians should enjoy learning, as continuing education is important in the occupation.

Advancement. Experienced medical records and health information technicians usually advance their careers by obtaining a bachelor's or master's degree or by seeking an advanced specialty certification. Technicians with a bachelor's or master's degree can advance and become a health information manager. (See the statement on medical and health services managers elsewhere in the *Hankdbook* for more information on health information managers.) Technicians can also obtain advanced specialty certification. Advanced specialty certification is typically experience-based, but may require additional formal education depending on the certifying organization.

Employment

Medical records and health information technicians held about 172,500 jobs in 2008. About 39 percent of jobs were in hospitals. Health information technicians work at a number of health care providers such as offices of physicians, nursing care facilities, outpatient care centers, and home health care services. Technicians also may be employed outside of health care facilities, such as in Federal Government agencies.

Job Outlook

Employment is expected to grow much faster than the average. Job prospects should be very good; technicians with a strong understanding of technology and computer software will be in particularly high demand.

Employment change. Employment of medical records and health information technicians is expected to increase by 20 percent, much faster than the average for all occupations through 2018. Employment growth will result from the increase in the number of medical tests, treatments, and procedures that will be performed. As the population continues to age, the oc-

currence of health-related problems will increase. Cancer registrars should experience job growth as the incidence of cancer increases from an aging population.

In addition, with the increasing use of electronic health records, more technicians will be needed to complete the new responsibilities associated with electronic data management.

Job prospects. Job prospects should be very good. In addition to job growth, numerous openings will result from the need to replace medical record and health information technicians who retire or leave the occupation permanently. Technicians that demonstrate a strong understanding of technology and computer software will be in particularly high demand.

Earnings

The median annual wage of medical records and health information technicians was $30,610 in May 2008. The middle 50 percent earned between $24,290 and $39,490. The lowest 10 percent earned less than $20,440, and the highest 10 percent earned more than $50,060. Median annual wages in the industries employing the largest numbers of medical records and health information technicians in May 2008 were:

    Federal Executive Branch $42,760
    General medical and surgical hospitals........................32,600
    Nursing care facilities 30,660
    Outpatient care centers..29,160
    Offices of physicians..26,210

Related Occupations

Health care occupations with similar responsibilities include:

  Medical and health services managers
  Medical transcriptionists

Sources of Additional Information

A list of accredited training programs is available from:
➤ The Commission on Accreditation for Health Informatics and Information Management Education, 233 N. Michigan Ave, 21st Floor, Chicago, IL 60601-5800. Internet: **http://www.cahiim.org**

For information careers and credentialing, contact:
➤ American Health Information Management Association, 233 N. Michigan Ave., 21st Floor, Chicago, IL 60601-5809. Internet: **http://www.ahima.org** or **http://himcareers.ahima.org**

➤ American Academy of Professional Coders, 2480 South 3850 West, Suite B, Salt Lake City, UT 84120. Internet: **http://www.aapc.com**

➤ Practice Management Institute, 9501 Console Dr., Suite 100, San Antonio, TX 78229. Internet: **http://www.pmimd.com**

➤ Professional Association of Healthcare Coding Specialists, 218 E. Bearss Ave., #354, Tampa, FL 33613. Internet: **http://www.pahcs.org**

➤ National Cancer Registrars Association, 1340 Braddock Place, Suite 203, Alexandria, VA 22314. Internet: **http://www.ncra-usa.org**

The Occupational Information Network (O*NET) provides information on a wide range of occupational characteristics. Links to O*NET appear at the end of the Internet version of this occupational statement, accessible at **http://www.bls.gov/ooh/ocos103.htm**