

Coders: 5 Ways to Build Your Professional Network



by Cindy Kibbe, BS (CLS), CCS

In our social-driven world, the old adage, “It’s not what you know, but who you know,” has become a professional imperative. As HIM professionals, we are always diligent about staying on top of our “what” — new codes and rules come out every year. But what about the “who?” Expanding your professional network of acquaintances is just as important as keeping current with your knowledge. Networking is crucial when looking for that first job, recovering from a lay off, searching for that next career, or even connecting with folks with which to compare best practices.

Here are five great ways to build your circle of professional friends:

1. Look Close to Home — Become active in your local professional association: AHIMA Component State Association (CSA) and/or local AAPC chapter. This is probably the single best tool you have in building relationships within our profession. Volunteer, go to meetings, get to know your local leaders and committee chairs. Don’t ignore other associations, either. Your local chapters of organizations such as the Health Information and Management Systems Society (HiMSS) and Association of Clinical Documentation Improvement Specialists (ACDIS) can extend your network outside of HIM.
2. Become Engaged — The internet has a myriad of “communities” where coders can post questions and answers to just about any HIM topic. AHIMA members should check out [AHIMA Engage](#) and AAPC members should visit [AAPC Forum](#). These online communities are a great way to not only seek advice on something like how to code that really weird procedure, but, more importantly, to share your knowledge with others. Become known as a “subject matter expert” and you’ll be someone others will want to get to know — and hire.
3. LinkedIn — Unlike other social platforms (can anyone say Tinder?), LinkedIn is strictly about networking and building professional contacts. No post-margarita binge selfies here. You can research companies on LinkedIn, find out who is working at them, and learn what contacts you have in common with others to make that next important connection. Yes, filling out the profile can be time-consuming. There is probably no better way, however, to connect with people that are just as serious about their profession as you are.
4. Don’t Be Too Cool for School — Whether you’re a student, new grad, or finished years ago, don’t overlook networking with fellow students, professors, and alumni. While your instructors might not be able to personally recommend you for jobs due to legal reasons or simply professionalism (favoritism is a no-no), many are more than willing to provide introductions. Alumni mixers are also a fast — and fun! — way to build a network of contacts in a relaxed atmosphere.
5. Lead an ‘Event’-Ful Life — Earn CEUs and make friends! What’s better than that? Go to HIM and health care conferences and events. Ignore the rubber chicken and hit the exhibit hall during lunch. The crowds are less and you will more likely get a chance to have a one-on-one conversation with a vendor from an interesting company. Conferences are a great way to make contacts across the country with people you might otherwise never get a chance to meet.

It can be difficult to walk into a room of people you’ve never met, stick out your hand, and say, “Hi” — but the rewards are limitless.

ICD-10

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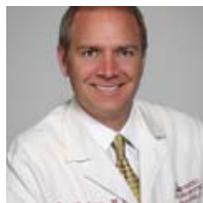
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