Go the Extra Mile for ICD-10-CM Implementation Success

Communication will set the wind in your sails.

By Deborah Grider, CPC, CPC-I, CPC-H, CPC-P, COBGC, CEMC, CPCD, CCS-P

As we prepare for the transition to ICD-10-CM, communication will be vital to manage expectations and identify who needs to do what and when. Whether this means one-on-one talks with your providers, staff, and key stakeholders to discuss ICD-10-CM or regularly scheduled status meetings with everyone in attendance, proper communication will ensure implementation success.

Effective Communication

Effective communication means you provide information in the right format at the right time with the right impact. It means that you provide necessary information and nothing more.

On smaller projects, communication is simple and requires little effort. The larger a project is, the more people get involved, and the more complex communication becomes. Larger projects require an advance communication plan, taking into account the individual needs of everyone involved. This is where a solid communication plan is essential to establish clear direction for ICD-10-CM implementation.

The Communication Plan

A communication plan allows you to communicate most efficiently and effectively to various constituents and provides priorities and milestones while preventing the delivery of an incorrect message to departments and staff. It provides focus, along with a sense of order and control, and will create a team atmosphere while establishing a chain of command.

A communication plan involves determining what the organization and its stakeholders' information needs are. For instance:

- What information should be collected?
- Who needs the information?
- When should the information be available?
- How should the information be formatted?

This process should include:

- Methods used to gather and store information
- Limits on who may give direction to whom, if any
- Relationships of reporting
- A list of stakeholders' contact information

- A schedule for information distribution
- A mechanism to update the plan as the project progresses

Important: The best time to develop a communication plan for your organization's ICD-10 implementation is now. Delay could hinder your final goals and objectives.

When developing a communication plan, first determine the project stakeholders. Identify the people or groups within the organization who will need information and determine their communication requirements. For example, a manager may need status updates more often than physicians and staff. Steering committee or project team members may need more information than others about project status, strategy, or vision.

Communication can take many forms. In each step, plan how to fulfill the communication needs for each department, employee, stakeholder, etc. When possible, streamline the process by looking for ways to communicate that will cover more than a single department's needs.

The communication plan sets the information exchange framework for ICD-10-CM implementation. It serves as a guide for communications throughout the project and should be updated as communication needs change. When creating your plan, identify and define the roles of people involved in the project. Include a communications matrix to map the communication requirements of the project.

The following steps will help you develop a communication plan for the implementation of ICD-10 in your organization.

Empower a Point Person or Project Manager
This person is responsible for ensuring successful implementation within the organization. He or she will update status reports, set up meeting schedules, take meeting notes, and manage the communication process.

Evaluate Current Communication Methods
Determine what departments or areas are doing to relay the ICD-10 messages to their department, providers, or staff. Perform an assessment of what each communication activity should achieve, and evaluate the effectiveness of each business area of ICD-10 implementation communication activity. Evaluate the communication capacity the organization has, determine

The best time to develop a communication plan for your organization's ICD-10 implementation is now. Delay could hinder your final goals and objectives.

what staff can be used for the project, and consider the time involved. Consider the incurred cost for additional communication resources.

Define Objectives and Goals

Your plan's objectives should include:

- ICD-10 code awareness;
- Implementation steps already initiated;
- Channels for communicating progress milestones;
- Identification of business areas needing improvement and what the problems are; and
- An awareness of barriers and challenges in the implementation process.

You can define the goals as a work program for each objective. Goals include general programs your communication plan will use to achieve these objectives. Identify how information will be gathered, and who is affected. Keep in mind: One of the important elements of successful implementation is to build awareness.

Identify Effective Communication Tools

Decide on the tools you'll use to accomplish ICD-10 goals. Be creative in your choice, but don't overlook the obvious and the easiest, such as e-mail updates, project status reports, staff or departmental meetings, etc. Keep your tools simple and easy for all members in the organization to use and comprehend.

Determine how much effort is required for each communication method within the organization. Some activities might be relatively easy to perform while others require more effort. If the communication is ongoing, estimate the effort over a one-month period. For instance, a status report might take one hour to create, twice a month. The total effort would be two hours.

Some communication activities are more valuable than others. Prioritize and determine which activities provide the most value for the least cost. If a communication activity takes a lot of time and provides little communication value, discard it. If a communication option takes little effort and proves to be valuable, include it in the final communication plan. If a communication activity is mandatory, include it no matter the cost. If a mandatory activity is time consuming, try negotiating with the stakeholders to find a less-intensive alternative.

Establish a Timetable and Evaluate Results

Once the objectives, goals, audiences, and tools are identified, quantify the results in a communication template, outlining what communication projects will be delivered and when. Designate logical time periods (monthly, weekly, etc.) for objectives' completion to help keep organized and on track. Build into your ICD-10 implementation communication plan a method for measuring results, such as periodic status reports on completed project work, departmental reports for presentation at staff meetings, and/or periodic senior management briefings. In a small medical practice, a management briefing might be a meeting to discuss progress with providers.

Awareness is Key

Bring ICD-10-CM awareness to your organization by communicating, mentoring, using question-and-answer sheets, and distributing other pertinent information to build confidence and enthusiasm in the project. A communication plan eases transition anxiety and keeps the entire organization involved and excited about the project.

The AAPC has developed a three-day ICD-10 Implementation Training Program for health plans and medical groups. Distance learning modules, webinars, and workshops will be available in 2010 at a reasonable cost to assist in ICD-10 implementation. For more information or to schedule training, please contact the AAPC at 800-626-2633 or send me an email at deb.grider@aapc.com.

As an added bonus, you can keep track of your personal ICD-10 implementation progress on the AAPC's Web site. Simply log on to your member page and, under ICD-10 Preparation, choose an option that best describes your organization from the dropdown menu. Click the Save button to view your personal implementation plan timeline and checklist.

Next time: Conducting an Impact Analysis … CE

Deborah Grider, CPC, CPC-I, CPC-H, CPC-P, COBGC, CEMC, CPCD, CCS-P is the AAPC's vice president of strategic development and the former AAPC National Advisory Board president. Deborah is currently writing the ICD-10-CM Implementation Guide.