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Health Information Technology: Career Opportunities

1.Introduction:

Good day. My name is Jennifer Later. I'm currently a student at Beal College in Bangor,

Maine and in the Health Information Technology course working towards my associate degree.

In 2019, after 37 years out of school, and 10 years out of the workforce, I decided I wanted to

return, but I knew I would need new and relevant skills. I have always wanted to be involved in

healthcare, but I didn't feel I was physically capable to work with patients. My next choice was

as a medical coder and knew certification was an important, and a degree would be better. If you

had asked me a year ago, what is health information technology, I wouldn't have had an answer.

At most I might have guessed that it had to do with healthcare, obviously, and less obvious, with

medical information of some sort. So, what is Health Information Technology? Wikipedia

describes HIT as "health information technology is information technology applied to health and

health care. It supports health information management across computerized systems and the

secure exchange of health information between consumers, providers, payers, and quality

monitors. Based on an often-cited 2008 report on a small series of studies conducted at four sites

that provide ambulatory care – three U.S. medical centers and one in the Netherlands – the use of

electronic health records was viewed as the most promising tool for improving the overall quality, safety and efficiency of the health delivery system." The American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) at ahima.org states "health information is human information. Certified professionals hold an intimate relationship with health information. While our patients don't often see us, we see our patients in a way no other healthcare professional does. This perspective is critical to the success of all modern health organizations. We see the person connected to the data, ensuring their information stays human-because when information stays human, it stays relevant." And according to Beal College's website, bealcollegee.edu "Health Information Technology (HIT) professionals are highly trained in the latest information management technology applications. HIT professionals ae vital to daily operations management of health information and electronic health records (EHRs). Ensuring a patient's health information – the data related to a person's medical history, including symptoms, diagnosis, procedures, and outcomes - is complete, accurate, and protected is one of the HIT professionals' main duties." It also indicated that the US Department of Labor HIT believes the profession will continue to grow. I would learn that there is a wide variety of careers within the HIT field and a wide assortment of places one can work.

2. Body Paragraph 1

One of those first jobs that interested me, is medical coding. I believe the first thing everyone thinks of when they imagine medical coding is that it's a growing and well-paid field. And while that is true, the importance of the job cannot be understated. Medical coding is used worldwide, and most countries use the same International Classification of Diseases (ICD), which is maintained by the World Health Organization (WHO) and modified to each country. According to the American Association of Professional Coders website aapc.com, there are six

official HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) mandated code sets serving different needs. I'm currently in a class on the ICD-10-PCS, which is the procedural coding system that has approximately 78,000 codes alone. AAPC also describes medical coding as "the transformation of healthcare diagnosis, procedures, medical services, and equipment into universal medical alphanumeric codes." Or more romantically "like a musician who interprets the written music and uses their instrument to produce what's intended, Medical Coding requires the ability to understand anatomy, physiology, and details of the services, and the rules and regulations of the payers to succeed." Medical coders need to be able to work independently, are usually on a tight schedule and expected to complete a predetermined number of provider notes each day. They may work in a private practice, a hospital, or remotely from home.

3. Body Paragraph 2

Apart from medical coding, I didn't truly grasp how many career opportunities were available. One of the more little-known ones is Cancer Registrar. I recall a conversation about it in my medical terminology class, and it has interested me ever since. In "Become a Cancer Registrar" at the National Cancer Registrars Association website ncra-usa.org, it explains in more detail. "Cancer registrars are data information specialists who collect and report cancer statistics. They capture a complete history, diagnosis, treatment, and health status for every cancer patient in the U.S." They go on to describe how the data collected by registrars provides essential information for research, healthcare providers and public health officials "to better monitor and advance cancer treatments, conduct research, and improve cancer prevention and screening programs." Cancer registrars work closely with physicians, administrators, researchers, and health care planners in order to provide support for cancer program development. Most registrars work for hospitals or central cancer registries.

4. Body Paragraph 3

      The list of occupations within the HIT career field is surprisingly varied. Bealcollege.edu lists Medical Coder, Medical Records, Clerk-Release of Information Specialist, Cancer Registrar, Data Analyst, Health Information Specialist, Health Information Clerk, Health Information Technician, Medical Records Analyst, Medical Records Coordinator, Medical Records Technician, Registered Health Information Technician, just to name a few. Plus Beal states that many industries have an increased demand for HIT professionals. Careers are available within academic institutions, consulting agencies, government agencies, and healthcare software companies. AHIMA.org offers certification programs such as Certified Coding Associate (CCA), Certified Coding Specialist (CCS), and Registered Health Information Technician (RHIT), which are increasingly important to continue advancing in the field of HIT.

5. Conclusion

      When I started this journey in 2019, I didn't fully understand what I had signed up for or what I would be able to do when I finished. Medical coding was what I thought I wanted to do, but until recently, I thought maybe I had made a mistake. I discovered though that I really enjoy my current coding class, which is inpatient procedure. Cancer registrar still sounds interesting and appears to be an important job where you could be in a position to actually make a difference. The variety of choices and options are actually be a bit overwhelming and I feel I won't know what I'd like to do until I have my externship. Even then, it may end up not being what I want. The best part of so many options is that you can change to another specialty, another position withing the same career field. Health Information Technology is a vast and varied field that is growing and continually changing.

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