

AHIMA Foundation Will Train Your Apprentices for Free

“THIS SOUNDS TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE!”

by Sharon Dinwiddie, MBA, CCA, CPC-A

Sharon Dinwiddie, MBA, CCA, CPC-A, has been accepted into the AHIMA Foundation's new apprenticeship program in the Coder track. She graduated this summer with an associate degree in Health Information Technology from Santa Barbara City College. Also contributing to this article was Becky Holton, CFRE, Director of Development, AHIMA Foundation.

The AHIMA Foundation,¹ has launched an apprenticeship program to provide immersive, on-the-job training for health information management (HIM) professionals entering positions of Hospital Coder/Coding Professional, Clinical Document Improvement Specialist, Business Analyst, or Data Analyst.

The AHIMA Foundation's *Managing the Talent Pipeline in Health Information Management* (MTP) apprenticeship project aims to (1) increase access to health care sector apprenticeship opportunities (particularly for members of underrepresented populations, including women, people of color, Veterans, and people with disabilities); (2) expand American Apprenticeship models within the health care industry; and (3) create career pathways that encompass pre-apprenticeship on-ramp programs and apprenticeships to align with other post-secondary educational offerings.

Placement of apprentices has begun, and the AHIMA Foundation is actively recruiting HIM employers to participate.

The Need

There is a gap between the skill level of new HIM graduates and the skill level desired by employers. This gap has become the primary barrier to both entry into and advancement within the HIM market. Over the years,

increasingly tight manpower budgets have led HIM employers to seek only experienced candidates for open positions. Hiring directors explain, “I do not have the budget or manpower to do the training that is necessary to

PLACEMENT OF APPRENTICES HAS BEGUN, AND THE AHIMA FOUNDATION IS ACTIVELY RECRUITING HIM EMPLOYERS TO PARTICIPATE.

bring an inexperienced person up to our required level of skill proficiency.”

Two problems have resulted from this industry trend; HIM employers are facing growing difficulty in filling positions as the existing pool of experienced talent progressively shrinks. At the same time, individuals aspiring to enter those careers encounter the brick wall of not being able to get hired, even after having earned the relevant educational degree and professional credential.

A New Solution

AHIMA Foundation's MTP apprenticeship program addresses this experience gap by preparing

individuals through skills training and experiential learning, bringing the apprentice's qualifications to the level required by employers in today's health care market. Further, the program serves to provide an onramp for new graduates seeking their first work experience and to boost career mobility for the working learner.

The MTP program, funded by a \$4.9 million grant through the U.S Department of Labor, aims to place 1,200 individuals in apprentice roles by 2020 and will provide the missing, initial, immersion and on-the-job training of the apprentices at no cost to the HIM employer or to the employee.

Dr. William J. Rudman, PhD, RHIA, the AHIMA Foundation's Executive Director, reports that, “HIM hiring directors tend to have two reactions when hearing that the AHIMA Foundation is launching a new apprenticeship program. The first one is, ‘I don't have time to train an apprentice.’ But after we explain that we provide the training and mentoring help, then, all of a sudden the second reaction is, ‘this sounds too good to be true!’”

How the Program Works

Current requirements for entry into the four specific apprenticeship roles which include a combination

of education and certifications that are stacked, latticed, and portable. The four apprenticeship roles are: Health Care Coding Professional, Clinical Documentation Improvement Specialist, Data Analyst, and Business Analyst.²

The AHIMA Foundation screens and interviews each applicant, then provides the employer with a pool of candidates to consider, based upon both the employer's criteria and the candidates' interests. The employer conducts its standard interviewing process and selects one or more apprentices for hire. Current employees may also take advantage of the program and move into the apprentice role to take advantage of program benefits, which include upskilling through immersion training and mentoring, a one-year AHIMA membership, and the ability to sit for a certification exam.

Once an apprentice is hired, the AHIMA Foundation will evaluate current

skill level. Then the apprentice will enter into an intense, professionally designed training and curriculum, customized to each position track for eight weeks to six months, depending on the progression of the apprentice's skills. Apprentices are then guided through on-the-job learning and skills demonstration through the conclusion of the program. "Our immersion training will target the technical aspects of the work," stated Dr. Rudman, "mentoring will target soft skills that are so vital to success in the workplace – the cultural side of becoming part of the HIM profession, as well as part of the organization they are working for."

Not all entrants into the workplace come with an understanding of how to be successful in the non-technical aspects of the job. An element of the program viewed by employers as particularly valuable is mentoring in "common employability skills." Instruction will consist of six one- to

two-hour modules – ranging from communication skills, to team building, to critical thinking. Modules will be delivered online and engage students through gaming, videos, and test assessments.

Apprenticeships vary in length depending on the role. However, progression and completion are dependent upon successful demonstration of established competencies and skills. The apprentice salary is determined by the employer. Employers may choose to pay the apprentice at a reduced percentage of its current rate for experienced workers in that same role. Pay increases occur as competencies/skills are demonstrated and training hours are met. Benchmark schedules differ by each registered apprenticeship role.

As with any employee, the employer has the right to dismiss an apprentice who is not performing acceptably.

BENEFITS OF FILLING HIM POSITIONS THROUGH AHIMA FOUNDATION'S APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM MANAGING THE TALENT PIPELINE IN HEALTH INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

1. Produces market-ready employee.

You will have an employee with the appropriate competencies and skills to be market ready because the apprentice will receive extensive training through an intense, professionally developed curriculum custom-designed for each apprenticeship track.

2. Requires only two hours per week of employer time.

The time-consuming role of training is provided by the AHIMA Foundation. Within the employer's organization, a designated staff person will need to spend only about two hours per week on this program, documenting the apprentice's progress.

3. No trainer expense.

The AHIMA Foundation provides the trainers and the curriculum at no cost to the employer or to the apprentice.

4. Reduced recruitment time and expense.

The AHIMA Foundation will provide apprentice screening and referral to help ease the load of the individuals who are recruiting and onboarding new employees.

5. Results in apprentice earning an industry-recognized certification.

After training, the AHIMA Foundation will pay the fee for the apprentice to take the first attempt at a professional certification exam relevant to that position. (For example, Coders will test for the CCS credential.)

6. Greater likelihood of apprentice remaining in the HIM field.

The AHIMA Foundation will pay for a one-year AHIMA membership, giving the apprentice broader exposure to the industry and helping to endear the person to a career in HIM.

7. Greater loyalty to your company.

Businesses that use apprenticeships reduce worker turnover by fostering greater employee loyalty, increasing productivity, and improving the bottom line. An apprentice learns not only professional skills but also the organization's culture.

There is always an inherent risk in hiring any employee. Using an apprentice program mitigates that risk in terms of both training investment and dollars.

A Pioneering Innovation in Health Care

"Managing the Talent Pipeline in Health Information Management" is the first of its kind in providing the possibility of a progressive career path," explained Dr. Rudman. "We looked at what was needed in the profession, and we talked a lot with industry. The AHIMA Foundation is the first organization to attempt a *national* apprenticeship program in health care," reports Rudman.

Most apprenticeships are apprentice-to-mastery, and that's all. By contrast, a unique feature of the AHIMA Foundation's program is that a participant can benefit from more than one apprenticeship across time in a career path. "A person may have started out as a biller, then use an apprenticeship to become a coder, then another to move into revenue cycle, then into auditing, then into analytics, and even use the Leadership apprenticeship we are developing to progress upward, possibly even into the C-suite," explained Dr. Rudman.

When asked what inspired him to develop the apprenticeship program, Dr. Rudman said, "I believe that the people in HIM are the heartbeat of health care. This is a really great way to help our people out. So we are looking at this program not

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Seek continuing education opportunities. The subject of soft skills was presented during the CHIA Student Chat Webinar in May, 2016. The CHIA Board will be exploring more options to offer educational sessions that will empower and enhance soft skills, in addition to the hard skills needed for career growth.

Sharpening soft skills paves the way to success in achieving career advancement and new opportunities in HIM.

References

Grasz, J. 10 April, 2014. Overwhelming majority of companies say soft skills are just as important as hard skills. Retrieved from careerbuilder.com/share/aboutus/pressreleasesdetail.aspx?sd=4/10/2014&id=pr817&ed=12/31/2014

Deborah Collier, RHIA, CHIA President, 2015-2017

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being just a one-shot approach when the grant is done, but something that would become an enduring part of what the AHIMA Foundation does to help promote the professional and help to ensure that health information management professionals have opportunities that will make a true difference in their lives."

"We committed to placing 1,200 apprentices over the next five years. However, our goal is double that," said Dr. Rudman, "we believe this goal is realistic given that hundreds of applications were initiated in only the first few months of the grant – a clear demonstration of the significant need. We need to get as many HIM employers to participate as we can. We are ready to start placing candidates *today!*"

References

¹The AHIMA Foundation is a 501(c)(3) philanthropic affiliate of the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA). ahimafoundation.org.

²An overview of the program and the employer's role is provided on the AHIMA Foundation website http://ahimafoundation.org/prodev/Registered_Apprenticeship.aspx

Sharon Dinwiddie, MBA, CCA, CPC-A

CHIA Educational Calendar

JULY

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