

FREQUENTLY-ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs) ABOUT WESTSIDE EXTENSION MEDICAL INSURANCE BILLING & CODING CERTIFICATE PROGRAM

1. What is the objective of this program?

Westside Extension's Medical Insurance Billing & Coding program prepares you for a career in healthcare. It gives you important foundational knowledge and skills. It also introduces you to the many types of jobs that knowledge applies to, and the great variety of career paths.

Students who obtain Medical Insurance Billing & Coding certificates from our program will have solid knowledge of healthcare industry processes, medical terminology and other core concepts necessary for employment in the field of healthcare.

2. What is job demand like?

Market trends indicate that:

- The health care marketplace – hospitals, doctors' offices, medical groups, health plans, etc. – is always in need of well-trained, capable staff. The demand for experienced billers, claims auditors, charge entry personnel and, in general, the entire revenue management cycle (RMC) staff is and will remain strong.
- The demand for qualified and CPC-certified coders is strong and will grow stronger as the older work force transitions and as ICD 10 becomes effective.

3. What do jobs pay?

Jobs that use the knowledge and skills taught in our program are many and varied, and pay will depend on location, venue, duties, past experience, abilities, and how well you sell yourself/negotiate. Within the areas of billing and coding – physician front or back office, hospital admissions, member services, and billing – pay rates range from \$12-\$25 per hour. Both billers and coders can make up to \$50 per hour. Salary.com and other Healthcare Industry Associations like American Academy of Professional Coders (AAPC), and American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) are a good place to start to research current salaries for Medical Insurance Billing & Coding professions.

4. Wow, how do I get the \$50/hour coding jobs?

You get high-paying healthcare jobs the same way you get any job. Leverage the knowledge, skills, and abilities you already have, gain healthcare experience, work hard, and stay educated. Make yourself the strongest healthcare professional you can. And remember, coders *can* make up to \$50/hour. This doesn't mean that's what all coding jobs pay. Our program can assist you with many healthcare careers.

5. Do I need a license to code?

There is no such thing as a license to code, but coding *certifications* – which attest to a certain level of knowledge – can be obtained through many professional organizations. The 'big dogs' are the AAPC and AHIMA.

Certifications are not necessary for entry-level or even many advanced positions within healthcare -- but the more extensive your portfolio, the better edge you will have. You want to be the strongest healthcare professional you can be. It's not likely you will code as an entry-level employee; it's not even common to bill from the beginning (but not unheard of either). Currently, the entire job market is intensely competitive; even MBAs and other advanced degrees volunteer (hint hint) in order to gain experience and be competitive for paying jobs.

6. What are AAPC and AHIMA?

In a nutshell: AHIMA is the American Health Information Management Association and AAPC is the American Academy of Professional Coders. Both are professional associations. Professional associations exist to unify, validate, advance and 'professionalize' a given profession. You can join AAPC as a student member for less than the cost of a professional membership – plus it will start you learning about and being part of the healthcare world.

The CPC (Certified Professional Coder) is a certification you can earn by taking an AAPC-sponsored test. AHIMA also gives an exam-based certification, called the CCA (Certified Coding Associate). You can review job listings to see if the types of jobs you want will require a certification, and if so, which one(s) – but again, you will not likely start off coding and this is something you can work up to and study for while volunteering/working in a healthcare setting in any capacity.

7. Will the Westside Extension Medical Insurance Billing and Coding program prepare me for these professional exams?

Our program is not specifically test prep, but if coding is what you decide you want to do, our program will have taught you what you need to prepare for the exam. Additional study will be required to prepare you to pass the CPC Certification exam, as they are very complex exams and require a dedicated focus to pass.

8. Do you teach a coding test prep course?

Our current curriculum does not include a CPC Coding Exam test prep course. We feel that teaching a coding test prep course alone, would not serve you well. We believe, that having a broad base of knowledge gives you many more career options in the workforce.

There are *many* jobs within healthcare for which this knowledge is useful. If you have management or administrative experience, you might become a CPPM (Certified Physician Practice Manager). That exam includes coding so this program will help you. If information technology is your thing, then RHIT (Registered Health Information Technician) or RHIA (Registered Health Information Administrator) could be part of your future – and again, this program can help you make that transition. RHITs and RHIAs need to understand insurance, billing, and coding in order to do their jobs. If you have legal background, you might go into compliance (again, you need to understand insurance, billing, and coding). The field abounds with certifications – and opportunities. As you progress through the program, you will find the industry niches that fit with your personality, experience, abilities, and interests. Our program can help you toward a growing, job-secure *career*, not just a billing or coding *job*.

9. What about billing certifications?

There are professional organizations that sponsor certification examinations to become credentialed in a designated area of medical billing and coding. The most notable associations are listed below. Our program does not endorse any particular organization. We encourage you to research each professional association to determine which align with your career goals.

- American Academy of Professional Coders (AAPC)
- American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA)
- American Medical Billing Association (AMBA)
- Medical Association of Billers (MAB)

10. What are the realities of entering the healthcare field?

You saw the hint in FAQ #4. We encourage anyone without healthcare experience to start volunteering in healthcare *in any capacity* (reception, filing, etc.) as soon as possible, so as to become familiar with language, protocols, and the general milieu of healthcare – as well as make contacts and prove yourself. Again, the entire job market is intensely competitive and you want to be able to talk the talk and walk the walk. Hospitals and community clinics always have volunteer opportunities – and even if you're handing out reading material to patients, you are learning how a hospital works, and making contacts.

As with many jobs, general computer savviness has become a necessity. We definitely encourage you to be familiar with the Microsoft Windows environment and Microsoft Excel.

Respected certifications, plus your experience(s) and transferable skills, knowledge and abilities will be compared to other applicants' – even with entry-level positions. *It all works together to make you a strong healthcare professional.*

11. What are the advantages of the Westside Extension certificate program?

- Working professionals as advisors and instructors
- Cost
- Flexibility
- Options to a) save by bundling classes or b) spread the cost out by paying as you go

12. Why is the Westside Extension Medical Insurance Coding & Billing Certificate so inexpensive compared to other programs?

Community colleges are non-profit. While Extension is not-for-credit and does not receive state monies – so therefore must be self-supporting like a business – we don't have to be motivated by profit. We are revenue neutral.

Our program is designed to minimize class/instructor time. For example, you don't pay an instructor to watch you practice finding codes, properly fill out forms or entering data, etc. You can do this on your own without supervision (homework!) at times that are convenient for you.

However, it also means you need to be self-motivated, and we highly recommend finding study buddies! There is considerable evidence that peer-to-peer learning (in which learners construct meaning together) is the most effective form of learning.

13. How do I set myself up to succeed?

- You'll get out of it in proportion to what you put into it.
- Keep your email address with us current and check email on a regular basis.
- Take charge of your own learning.
Be prepared, read the syllabus!
Keep up with reading and homework/practice.
Know where to go and what to bring for each class.
- Form study groups or at least identify a study buddy and help each other (even if by phone or email).
- Be comfortable with technology - especially windows-style interfaces, SmartPhones, and Microsoft Excel.
- Get health care experience - even one day a month – if at all possible. In six months, when you've completed the program, you will have six months' experience!
- Seek your niche.
- Be good to yourself – and your learning community/cohort.

****Please feel free to contact our office at (310) 287-4475, if you have additional questions.***