



# Professional Association of Healthcare Coding Specialists

## Certification Examination Preparation Recommendations

### The purpose of Certification

Certification is a process that provides a level of confidence that the applicant is knowledgeable in a specific area of endeavor. In certifying medical coders, PAHCS is really providing a service to the physicians or other employers of the candidates. Employers desire assurance that the medical coder has the knowledge and skills to effectively provide coding services in an efficient manner.

PAHCS certification examinations are designed to fulfill that purpose. We test candidates on the base of knowledge required to perform daily coding duties, as well as the frequently unusual situations encountered in medical practices.

### How tough is the examination?

The examinations are extracted from standard coding textbooks, augmented slightly by recommendations from coding consultants, Community College Educators, and Medicare advisories.

All examination questions are reviewed and approved by the Certification Committee. Questions that 90% of the candidates fail to answer correctly are analyzed, modified or deleted as appropriate. Questions that 90% of the candidates answer correctly are, similarly, analyzed, modified or deleted as appropriate. The objective is to ensure that each examination is not too difficult, while at the same time ensuring that each examination is not too easy.

### How can I prepare for the examination?

The best preparation is the experience garnered over many years of on-the-job performance. A close second is networking with other coders in your specialty. Forming "study groups" has been found to be very effective by many. Study Groups have the unique capability of revealing the enormous amount of knowledge the members of the group already have.

Independent study has the advantage of allowing the candidate to be flexible in the intensity of review. One hour sessions three or four times a week are the most productive. Simply divide the area of concentration into ten or twelve segments and tackle one segment at each study session.

Remember, you will not be tested on medical coding outside of your specialty, so all of the material will be familiar to you. The examination is only to determine that you are applying the codes in the manner currently prescribed by the healthcare community.

*Additionally, at [www.pahcs.org](http://www.pahcs.org) you can view the FREE program developed by the PAHCS Director of Education, Marge McQuade, CMM, CMSCS designed to improve test taking skills.*

### Recommended Reading

The "General" Section of the examination pertains to coding knowledge relevant to all specialties, such as E&M Coding and Modifiers.

Resources to be reviewed include:

Documentation Guidelines for Evaluation and Management Services (1995 and 1997).

CPT; AMA, Sections on:

- Introduction
- Illustrated Anatomical and Procedural Review
- E/M 99201
- Surgery Guidelines
- Medicine Guidelines
- Vaccines, Toxoids
- Appendix A, Modifiers
- Appendix D, Add-on Codes

ICD-9-CM Volumes 1 and 2, AMA, Sections on:

- Introduction
- How to Use ICD-9-CM for Physicians
- ICD-9-CM Official Conventions
- Additional Conventions
- Coding Guidelines - Outpatient

HCPCS Introduction and general structure.

The "Specialty" Section of the examination pertains to coding knowledge relevant to the particular specialty selected by the candidate. Resources to be reviewed include:

CPT, AMA, Sections on:

- Procedures relevant to the selected specialty
- Guidelines at the beginning of each Section

ICD-9-CM Volumes 1 and 2, AMA, Sections on:

- Conditions relevant to the selected specialty
- Structure and organization of E-Codes
- The Tabular List for the selected specialty
- Morphology of Neoplasms (Appropriate Specialties)

PAHCS Study Guide on the selected specialty.

Visit PAHCS on the web at [www.pahcs.org](http://www.pahcs.org) or call the National Office at 888-708-4707 to order the study guide for your specialty

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Visit our web site at [www.pahcs.org](http://www.pahcs.org)