

CODING edge

Highlights

From the 2007 National Conference

Plus

So You Think You Have a Thief?
Encounter With a Psychiatrist
Find Your Niche and Specialize
Offshore Outsourcing

Coder of the Year LuAnn Jenkins, CPC (left), and
Networker of the Year Suzanne Quinton, CPC, CCS-P (right)

American Academy of Professional Coders

CODING edge

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Highlights

From the 2007 National Conference

The AAPC hosted an information-packed national conference with something for everyone. Coders who didn't make it to the conference this year should look for regional conferences coming to cities around the country.

By Torrey Kim, CPC

THE AMERICAN ACADEMY of Professional Coders offered its 2,100 national conference attendees a new way to set sail on an adventure — by offering a swashbuckling pirate-themed awards ceremony and banquet as a way to get coding professionals networking.

The awards ceremony was just one facet of the event-filled conference in Seattle, where attendees were treated to more than 60 outstanding breakout sessions, classified according to specialty, facility type, compliance issues and many other criteria, offering something for everyone.

As always, one of the biggest highlights each year is announcing the Coder of the Year and Networker of the Year awards. This year, the AAPC honored LuAnn Jenkins, CPC, as its Coder of the Year, and Suzanne Quinton, CPC, CCS-P, as Networker of the Year. In addition to announcing the Coder and Networker of the Year awards, the AAPC also honored the Loma Linda, CA, chapter as its Local Chapter of the Year.

Coder of the Year

The AAPC bestows the title of Coder of the Year on a coder who displays a vast knowledge of coding and who also

demonstrates leadership in his or her career. The honoree must be dedicated to providing the highest standard of professional coding and billing services to employers, clients and patients, and their professional and personal behavior must be exemplary. In

addition, the AAPC aims to select a coder who maintains and enhances the dignity, status, competence and standards of coding for professional services. This year's recipient exemplifies all of these traits.

Those who know LuAnn Jenkins marvel



AAPC President and CEO Reed Pew welcomes attendees to the awards banquet.

at her ability to break down complex regulatory information and convey it to any audience. “She is so smart, and she can relay information to beginning, experienced and specialty coders, and even physicians,” says Jill Young, CPC, one of many coders who nominated Jenkins for the honor. “I wouldn’t be certified if it hadn’t been for LuAnn’s patient and thorough teaching. She inspired me to achieve more in the coding field. I can’t think of a finer individual who ‘upholds the higher standard’ of the AAPC,” Young says.

Jenkins has been in the medical field for 23 years, and has been certified since 1999. She started her billing company, MedTrust, LLC, five years ago.

As a consultant, auditor and educator, Jenkins is adept at coding all types of outpatient charts. “I love the challenge of figuring out the pieces of the puzzle involved in coding,” Jenkins says. “Anyone who really likes the business is someone who likes getting the answers, such as, ‘Why wasn’t this paid?’ or ‘What do the regulations say?’”

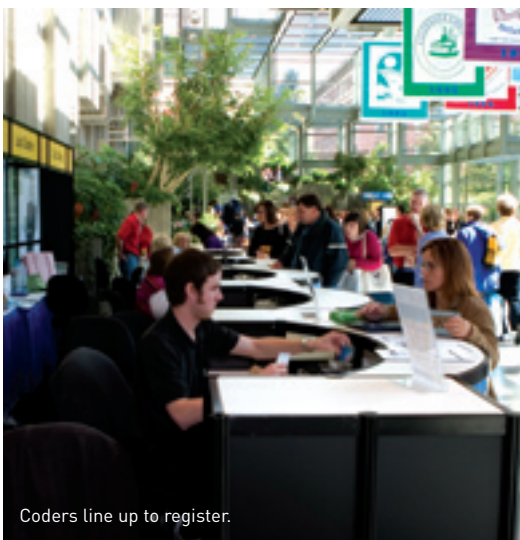
Jenkins is well known among her Lansing, MI, local chapter members as someone who knows the rules of coding — not just her opinion or her assumption on how to code a chart, but how the regulations prescribe coding. In fact, those who know Jenkins say she will spend as long as it takes to track down information, guidelines and policies. She never exhausts her resources because her list of resources is so vast.

In addition to her work as a consultant and prominent role with the Lansing chapter, Jenkins has also performed training for the Michigan Medical Society for the past 10 years. She doesn’t limit her local chapter education to only the Lansing members — she has been known to travel to other local chapter meetings throughout Michigan to train coders on topics that are near and dear to her.

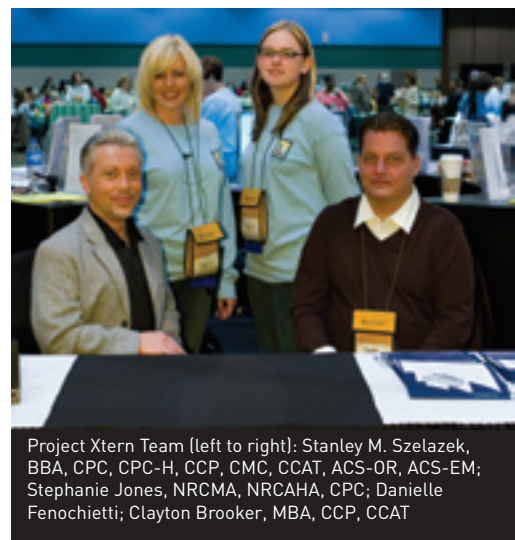
Her advice to fellow coders? “You must



Conference attendees during a class change.



Coders line up to register.



Project Xtern Team (left to right): Stanley M. Szelazek, BBA, CPC, CPC-H, CCP, CMC, CCAT, ACS-OR, ACS-EM; Stephanie Jones, NRCMA, NRCAHA, CPC; Danielle Fenochietti; Clayton Brooker, MBA, CCP, CCAT

stay current — guidelines change rapidly in this field and you have to stay on top of them. This can be difficult, but it’s essential to a successful career,” she says.

Networker of the Year

It takes vision to be the founder of a new local chapter — especially when only a small handful of people show up at the meetings. But AAPC’s Networker of the Year Suzanne Quinton persevered, growing the Tulsa, OK, chapter from four members in 1996 to currently more than 50 attendees at each meeting.

“We now put on our own yearly conference and bring out-of-town speakers in,” Quinton says. “I’ve also personally offered review courses for coders who are hoping to get certified.”

As owner of Quinton Coding, a consulting firm in Tulsa, Quinton is living her dream job. But she still feels the same

way about the coding profession as she did when she started coding over 22 years ago.

“I love the challenges of coding,” Quinton says. “I love the fight between the carriers and the physicians. I give the physicians no more and no less than they deserve — just what’s fair.”

Quinton also realizes how the importance of having good coders has grown over the years. “When I started in this field, some physicians didn’t know what coders were. Now with so much emphasis on compliance and HIPAA, they realize how important we are.”

Quinton reminds coders to stay aware of the total office philosophy — don’t get so focused on the coding process that you aren’t familiar with how the whole practice operates.

“When I began coding, there weren’t any schools or classes that offered medical coding as a field of study,” she says.

“Everyone at that time was self-taught and was usually exposed to coding at the same time they were working at the front desk, filing insurance claims, working the accounts receivable or working in the file room.

“I strongly believe the more well-rounded experience and knowledge you have from working in a medical office, the better coder you will be,” Quinton says. “You will have a better understanding of the entire billing process and that will make you a better coder — guaranteed!”

To qualify as Networker of the Year, an individual must display an ongoing commitment to the promotion of medical coding, must work with and assist others in their desire to excel in the field, and must maintain the standards and objectives of the AAPC.

AAPC as Host

For the AAPC, the main advantage to hosting the conference was getting to talk directly with members — this way, the AAPC can offer the maximum benefit to every coding professional. For attendees, there were myriad advantages to being at the conference.

“There is such a vast storehouse of knowledge that can be obtained at conference,” says Douglas Duncan, CPC, a medical billing analyst in Anchorage, AK. “Not just at the educational sessions, but also from meeting with other people and networking.”

Most attendees agreed that education was one of the great benefits of joining their coding colleagues at conference.

“I’ve never walked away from conference without having learned something,” says Belinda Inabinet, CPC, CCP, a cardiology coder from Columbia, SC. “Getting to know other coders and hearing how they do things is really informative, and of course, so are the educational sessions.”

The AAPC proved that its speakers were well-matched with the sessions they taught — some general sessions were so popular



Conference breakfast.



Coders at the pirate-themed awards banquet.



The band livens up the night at the awards dinner.

that coders found the classrooms standing room only. “I learned a lot from the Career Nuts and Bolts session,” says Amanda Moore of New York. “I didn’t pass my CPC exam the first time I tried and I’m planning to take it again later this year, so the combination of the educational sessions and the career planning tips were really helpful.”

Specialty Exams Debuted

Nearly 200 coding professionals took the specialty exams to gain a specialty credential in one of five areas: cardiology, OB/GYN, orthopedics, general surgery and E/M coding.

“We beta tested the first five specialty exams at the conference, but we expect to roll out exams for 15 specialty certifications by the end of the year,” says Nancy L. Reading, RN, BS, CPC, the AAPC’s director of educational services. “These certifications will allow our members to show that they are master’s level coders in their specialties.”

Coders who took the exams found them

challenging but essential in furthering their coding careers. “I took the OB/GYN specialty exam to ensure that I’m up to par with AAPC standards,” says Donna Mazura, CPC, who has been coding OB/GYN charts for over 10 years.

NAB Meets for the First Time

The AAPC announced the esteemed members of its 2007-2008 National Advisory Board (NAB), after which Cindy Parman, CPC, CPC-H, RCC, handed over the presidency of the NAB to Deborah Grider, CPC-EMS, CPC-H, CPC-P, CCS-P.

As the AAPC moves forward with the new NAB, members can also look ahead to new ideas and benefits for members.

“One of our goals in the coming year is to promote coding certification to physicians and educate them on the value of certified coders,” says AAPC President and CEO Reed Pew. “We’re looking forward to creating a members’ bill of rights, doing more to enhance local chapters, working with a lobbyist to gain greater acceptance with the Department of Health and Human

Services, and creating a true community of members who can participate and contribute in a variety of ways.”

For her part, Parman has tremendous optimism for the future. Going forward, “the AAPC will grow the membership, support specialty credentials and increase respect for the medical coding community,” she says.

The new advisory board, as well as the recent leadership changes in the AAPC’s national office in Salt Lake City, have inspired coders to embrace upcoming positive changes for the AAPC. “I appreciate the strength that’s coming in to the AAPC, and I feel like it’s a new step in professionalism for all of us,” says Wendy Meier, CPC, a coder at Pediatrix Medical Group in Phoenix, AZ.

Project Xtern in the Spotlight

Coding professionals lined up to learn more about the AAPC’s Project Xtern program, which matches beginning coders with companies that can give them field experience in the coding arena.

“Project Xtern is a win-win program,” says Project Xtern Program Manager Stanley Szelazek, CPC, CPC-H. “It’s a win for the member and a win for the facility. We have to give coders the best opportunities, because someone gave those opportunities to all of us once,” Szelazek says.

Coders responded enthusiastically to the concept, noting that the coding profession has long needed an AAPC-sponsored extern program. Project Xtern is expected to fill a gap, aiding new coders who need real-world coding experience following their billing and coding training courses.

Regional Conferences

Coding professionals waited anxiously to hear the location of next year’s conference, which will be in Orlando, FL, in June 2008. Florida coders cheered with excitement as the news was announced.

Coders who are looking for a conference closer to home can call on one of AAPC’s upcoming regional conferences that will take place between June and October of this year. The AAPC will be hosting these conferences in Hartford, CT; Des Moines, IA; Indianapolis, IN; Houston, TX; and Atlanta, GA.

“The regional conferences give AAPC members more cost-friendly conference experiences,” Pew says.

In addition, the regional conferences will require less time traveling, and allow coding professionals to focus the maximum amount of time on the educational and networking sessions.

Members responded enthusiastically to news of the regional conferences. “I applaud the AAPC for hosting regional conferences,” Duncan says. “As a coder in Alaska, it’s hard to make it to the national conferences unless they’re on the West Coast. The regional conferences will allow us to attend more often.”

Coders who are interested in learning more about helping to “uphold a higher standard” at conferences throughout the country are encouraged to visit the AAPC’s website at www.aapc.com. ■

Torrey Kim, CPC, is senior editor of AAPC’S Coding Edge magazine.



AAPC members shop for official products. The new clothing and specialty guides were popular items at the AAPC Product Store.



AAPC members enjoy the pirate-themed banquet.