PROJECT XTERN AAPC
Credentialing the Business Side of Medicine

Coders Questions and Answers

Q: Who do I call for general questions about Project Xtern?
A: General questions can be answered from the Project Xtern Overview that can be found at www. aapc.com. Please note that each Approved Official Extern Site (AOES) is an independent facility and will only have information about how the AOES is operated in their company.

Q: Do I have to be an AAPC member to get an externship from AOES?
A: Yes, the students applying for an externship must be a current member of the AAPC in order to be placed at an AAPC-AOES facility.

Q: Do I get paid for the externship?
A: Normally externships are not paid positions. Project Xtern is set up so that the AOES provides hands-on mentoring. In the event that the AOES is willing to provide compensation of any kind, please know that it would be between the AOES facility and the member. This question is most appropriate when asked at an official extern interview with the prospective member and AOES facility.

Q: What information do I need to provide the AOES when applying for an externship?
A: Please provide your resume and proof of current AAPC membership. The AOES will notify you if you need any additional items for the specific externship you are applying for.

Q: If I receive an externship, can I work remotely?
A: Externships require hands-on involvement and cannot be done remotely. Externships depend on direct, face-to-face communication to ensure a quality experience for the extern and the AOES.

Q: Can I work evenings?
A: The externship typically functions during normal business hours. Exceptions may be made by the AOES but under most circumstances evening hours are not available.

Q: How many hours a week do I work?
A: Externs can work anywhere from 10-40 hours per week and this is finalized on an individual bases as determined by the AOES.

Q: Will I be hired by the AOES site?
A: This program is not designed for you to be hired directly by the AOES. It is at the sole discretion of the hiring facility, their employment needs and whom they chose to hire. Most members completing an externship hope to be hired for employment at the expiration of the externship.

Q: What if I cannot find an AOES in my area?
A: You can encourage a facility in your area to apply to be an AOES. The facility simply completes the AAPC-AOES application AAPC approval. Upon approval and as a bonus for you, you are awarded with $50 AAPC Bucks.

Q: Is the AOES a coding school?
A: No, the AOES is typically a billing and/or coding service that will mentor you while you code actual narrative reports (i.e., operative reports, office notes, radiology reports, hospital admission records, etc.) and gain exposure to industry specific companies and their work flow.

Q: My current school requires me to complete an externship prior to graduation. Do I contact the AOES or my school's extern coordinator?
A: When the school requires the student to complete an externship prior to program completion, and is a mandatory part of the student's studies, the school's official extern coordinator must contact the AOES and facilitate the student's interview. If the AOES decides to place the student at their facility, the "extern coordinator" will make all of the necessary arrangements with the AOES.

Q: How will my school know about the AOES facility for my extern placement if they have never used that site for student placement in the past?
A: You should direct both your school's program director and extern coordinator to the AAPC website for Project Xtern information. Inform your school of your interest to be placed at one of the AOES sites if one is listed as available in your local area. Remember this is an AAPC member benefit only.

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Q: I do not have a required externship as part of an educational program completion requirement. Can I still be an extern?
A: Yes, you would be a volunteer extern. You would contact the AOES in your local area and arrange an extern interview. This externship is done through you as the member and the facility.

Q: If the AOES facility does not hire me then how do I benefit from completing a non-paid externship?
A: The biggest benefit of an externship, either paid or unpaid, is the experience the extern gains from hands-on experience in the industry. The need for experience is paramount when being considered for any position in the medical coding and billing field. The other key factor to remember is that this is the time to impress the facility who has offered you the position. An employer who is impressed by your positive attributes and skills will be more willing to offer a permanent position if in the event there is an open position available.

Q: Is this program only for student AAPC members?
A: No, Project Xtern can only be utilized by newly certified members. This program assists all members who want a new experience in a new specialty or to those who may have just relocated to a new area and are unable to find employment.

Q: Do I call the AAPC for placement in an AOES?
A: No, the AAPC is not a placement agency. The AAPC acts as a third party in the project and is a resource only to our members. Please contact AOES directly for placement as AAPC cannot directly perform the functions of placing externs. All of the contact information for each facility is found on the AAPC website and is listed as a resource only.

Facility Questions and Answers

Q: What is an AAPC-AOES?
A: AAPC-AOES stands for American Academy of Professional Coders – Approved Official Extern Site. In short, this is any healthcare facility that has been approved to be part of providing AAPC members experience through mentorship.

Q: Why did AAPC start this program?
A: The AAPC has taken feedback from its members very seriously regarding providing opportunities for industry experience and job placement. Project Xtern reaches out to our medical coding/billing community in an effort to provide these members with the resource to gain that valuable experience and learn along the way through mentorship. This will provide the member with valuable tools and necessary references when attempting to secure an entry level position in this field.

Q: What benefits does a facility gain through being an AAPC-AOES?
A: The facility gains a wonderful opportunity to observe the extern as a potential fit for an entry level position. Typically within the first two to three weeks the facility can determine the extern's work habits and ethics, motivation levels, communication styles and their ability to adapt and progress in the field.

As soon as two weeks, the extern can begin to provide valuable assistance to the facility by performing these tasks, while they continue learn more each day. The value of the extern becomes clearly apparent to the facility when the rest of the unit begins to experience relief from what can be overwhelming workloads. In any other new hire circumstance the facility does not have the advantage of "trying out the employee" before permanently hiring the person. Typically facilities hire a new position and pay them for 30-90 days to be trained on systems and processes. Overall having an extern through this program saves the facility money and promotes loyal dedicated employees.

Q: What if the extern is not working out?
A: If at any time you feel that the extern is not a good fit you may release them at any time. The facility has complete control and there is no guarantee to the extern that they will remain at the AOES until the expiration date of the externship.

Q: What does HIPAA privacy rule say about allowing non employees, specifically students viewing Protected Health Information (PHI)?
A: The Department of Health and Human Services has published an FAQ about this very topic. It states: The definition of "health care operations" in the Privacy Rule provides for "conducting training programs in which students, trainees, or practitioners in areas of health care learn under supervision to practice or improve their skills as health care providers." Covered entities can shape their policies and procedures for minimum necessary uses and disclosures to permit medical trainees access to patients' medical information, including entire medical records.

Q: Does the AAPC see this as a positive compliance move for facilities?
A: Yes, in fact the Office of Inspector General (OIG), has published the following information: "Ideally new billing and coding employees will be trained as soon as possible after assuming their duties and will work under an experienced employee until their training

has been completed." Federal Register/ Vol 65, No 194 Thursday October 5, 2000. Notices.

Q: Does the AAPC recommend that the student signs a waiver of liability?
A: The AAPC encourages each facility to check with their risk management and or administration faculty for appropriate waiver verbiage. The verbiage may be different from state to state. The AAPC has a sample general waiver of liability on their project extern website. This is a sample only and is not to be used prior to clearance with the facility's risk management team, legal department or administration. It should also be noted that when a student is placed at a facility as part of a program requirement prior to graduation, the educational institution typically covers all liability for the extern while they are completing their educational requirements at the facility.

Q: How will the student know about the facilities who are part of the AOES?
A: AAPC members will receive a tips sheet in their new member packets. All members will continue to hear about the program each month in the Coding Edge and at our various nationwide events. All of the Project Xtern information leads members to the AAPC website where they can access all necessary information, including a list of facilities that have agreements to accept AAPC member externs. Your facility along with your contact information will be listed on the AAPC website under the appropriate state.

Q: Our facility sent in our agreement but we are not listed on the site yet, why?
A: The AAPC website is updated and the AOES facilities once a week. If you do not see your site listed within two weeks of faxing your signed agreement, please contact Project Xtern Program Manager Heidi Larsen at heidi.larsen@aapc.com.

Q: Does the AAPC give any benefits to facilities for signing on as an AOES?
A: Yes, the AAPC rewards facilities by providing them with one free audio seminar a year for every year they are an approved facility. The reward will be included in the facility welcome packet with your certificate and welcome letter. Thereafter the free audio seminar certificate will be mailed to you at your anniversary sign-on date. It will come in the form of AAPC Audio Bucks. This is just our way of saying thank you for giving back to our AAPC medical coding and billing community.

Q. Can we provide Xternships for other colleges/schools, or are we required to only use the AAPC Project Xtern program?
A. Yes, you may provide Xternships for any other college/school or program that you desire. We only ask that when an AAPC member contacts you with regard to Project Xtern that you follow our limited program rules as outlined on the AAPC-AOES agreement form. We encourage you and your facility to participate in as many mentorship programs that you are able to.

Q. How long is the Project Xtern Mentor Program?
A. This is up to your facility. Most programs have a window of six to 12 weeks of required externship.

Q. Is there an evaluation form that we can use or should use to evaluate the Xtern?
A. Yes, you will find it on the "Project Xtern" web page located at www.aapc.com. This form should be used at the end of the Xternship and a copy should be provided to your Xtern.

Q. Will the AAPC be tracking how many Xterns we have assisted each year and if they were hired or not?
A. Yes, we are currently developing an online tool that will be accessible before the January 2008 anniversary date of Project Xtern. We will require all AAPC-AOESs to complete this form online at the end of each year. This form will tell us three things: 1) Your Xtern AAPC member name, 2) if they completed or did not complete the Xternship with your facility, and 3) if they were hired or not. Keep checking the Project Xtern web page at www.aapc.com for this form.

Q. How many Xterns does the AAPC-AOES have to place each year?
A. This is determined completely by the needs and availability of the AAPC-AOES. We understand that some facilities will be able to have more Xterns at their facility based on need and mentor availability. Some AAPC-AOESs will only place an Xtern when an job opening becomes available and may use the Xtern program as a training mechanism. The AAPC appreciates the the AAPC-AOES involvement at any level.

More Questions?
Contact Project Xtern Program Manager:
Heidi Larsen
heidi.larsen@aapc.com
800-626-2633 x 147