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Specialty Coding Round Up

Section-by-section analysis of CCI Version 17.0

Anesthesia	Cardiovascular	Radiology
Digestive	Musculoskeletal	Urinary
E/M	Nervous System	... and more

2010 Coding Professionals' Salary Survey: Average salary climbs to \$49K

Did you receive a raise in 2010? If not, you're in the minority. More than 73% of your fellow coding professionals reported a salary increase last year – with an average raise of 4% – according to the 2010 Coding Professionals' Salary Survey, conducted by *Medical Practice Coding Pro*.

Coding professionals earned an average of \$49,365 in 2010, up from the \$46,654 respondents reported in the 2008 survey – an increase of 5.8%. For those of you paid by the hour, the overall average was \$18.79 per hour, which equates to an annual salary of \$39,083 – a slight increase from the hourly rate of \$18.61 reported in 2008.

Compare your career profile with survey 'averages'

Take a look to see how much you have in common with the average 2010 Coding Professionals' Salary Survey respondent. She is 47 years old and has been working in physician administrative services for more than 15 years – the last nine at her current employer (yes, she, 96% of respondents are female). She works full-time, typically putting in 40-44 hours per week (55%). And more than one-quarter of respondents say they work 45 hours or more each week, with 17% reporting they work 45-49 hours/week and 10% reporting 50 or more hours/week.

Our average coding professional receives 25 days of paid time off (sick leave, vacation, personal leave and holidays) each year, and her benefits package also may include:

- health insurance (87% of respondents);
- 401K (79%);
- dental insurance (69%);
- certification/CEU cost assistance (66%);
- life/disability insurance (61%);
- bonus or profit-sharing incentives (46%);
- vision insurance (43%);

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- education/tuition assistance (30%);
- free or reduced cost medical care (24%); and/or
- pension (19%).

TIP: If your salary negotiations aren't as successful as you'd like, turn to your benefits package. Benefits such as CEU cost assistance, tuition assistance and free or reduced medical care can help keep money in your pocket to offset the absence of additional funds on payday.

Our average coding professional works for a physician practice/clinic (80%) and performs a variety of functions, the most common being coding (88%), chart auditing (56%) and appealing claims denials (56%). She also may train clinicians and/or staff (53%), analyze reimbursement and maintain fee schedules (49%), and file claims (45%) – among other duties.

She holds a coding certification (71%) and usually abstracts codes and modifiers from notes – the exception being E/M services in the office, where 51% of respondents say the clinician selects the code from a template or superbill. **TIP:** Look to coding certification as another way to increase compensation – 58% of respondents say they saw a salary increase, 7% garnered a bonus, 2% gained a promotion and another 24% received some combination of the three after becoming a certified coder (see chart, pg. 5).

She likely works for an organization with fewer than four practice locations (47%) and in a practice with between five and 10 physicians (28%). The coding and billing group at her practice/organization employs less than eight staff members (64%). If you were to join her practice as an entry-level coder, you would earn an annual salary of \$30,292.

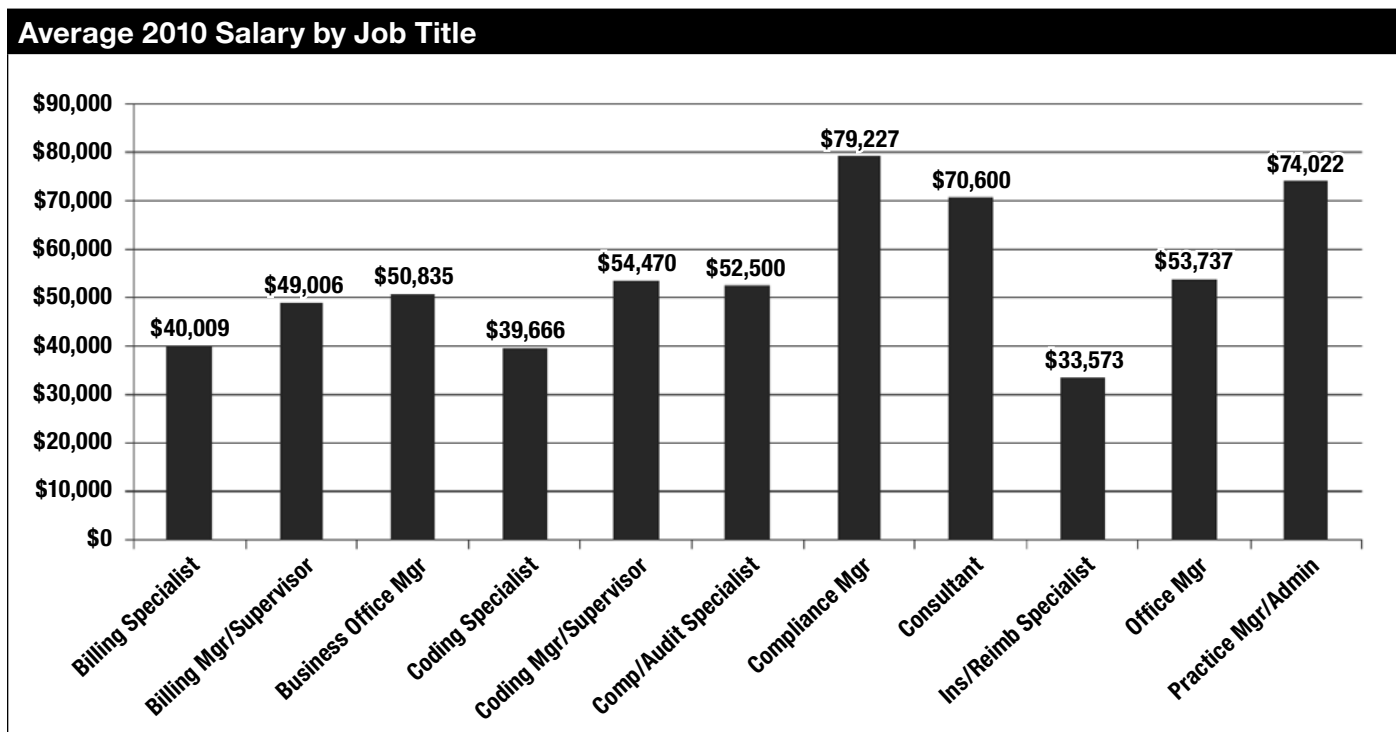
Our average coding professional typically reports to the practice administrator (18%), physician/clinician (15%) or business office manager (14%). During her performance review, the top three criteria on which she is judged are:

1. efficiency of coding (51%) or billing (33%);
2. improving accounts receivable (32%); and
3. compliance (27%).

She also may be evaluated on her role in reducing claims denials (24%), improving the overall efficiency of the practice (20%) and educating staff and/or clinicians (17%).

Compliance titles earn higher salaries, 'coding specialists' earn \$39,666

To help you put the survey data to practical use, let's delve a little deeper into the results and break down respondents' average salaries by job title, practice specialty, geographic region, education and more.



We examined data collected from 215 respondents to our unscientific nationwide online survey for physician practice coders, which was open Oct. 19 through Dec. 17, 2010. To arrive at the “average” numbers, we evaluated all survey responses, then trimmed off the top 1% and bottom 1% to eliminate outliers.

If your job title specifies a compliance function, you likely earn a higher salary than your billing and coding colleagues, which is consistent with the results of our surveys in previous years. For example, a compliance/audit specialist earned an average salary of \$52,500 in 2010, while a billing specialist earned \$40,009 and a coding specialist earned \$39,666. To put it another way, compliance/audit specialists are paid nearly one-third more than their coding and billing counterparts (see the chart, pg. 2, for a full list of average salaries by job title).

The bright side for billing specialists? Your pay is growing the fastest, with an average raise of 7.55% in 2010. And which job title saw the slightest increase from 2009 to 2010? Compliance/audit specialists, who saw an average increase of 1.35%. So, the gap in pay is shrinking, albeit in small chunks.

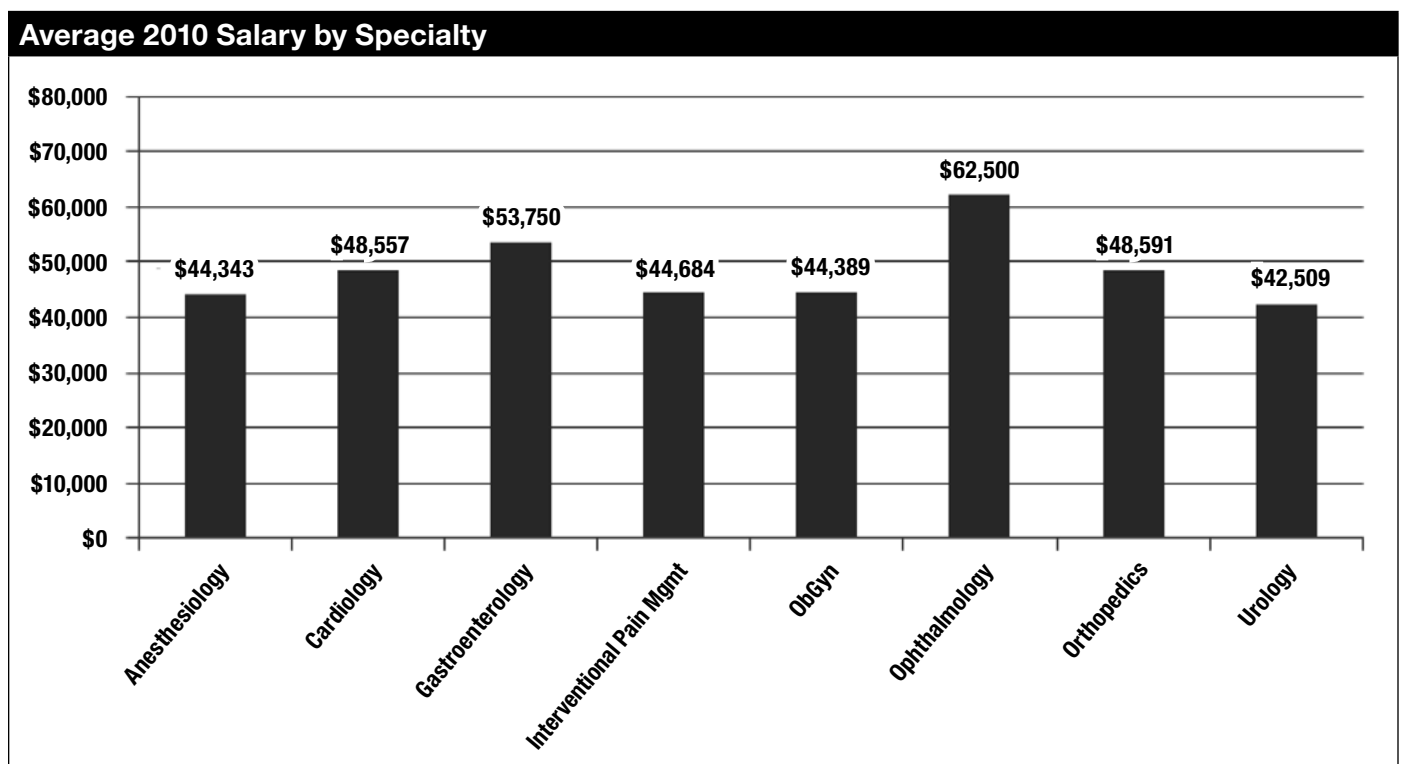
More than one-third of respondents (34%) identified themselves as coding specialists. The other top titles: billing manager or supervisor (15%); practice

manager or administrator (9%); office manager (8%); billing specialist (7%); coding manager or supervisor (6%); business office manager (6%); insurance or reimbursement specialist (2%); compliance or audit specialist (2%); consultant (2%); and compliance manager (1%).

Coding specialists accounted for not only the highest number of respondents, but the highest percentage (42%) of respondents within a title paid hourly. On average you earned \$18.56 per hour, which equates to an annual salary of \$38,605. The hourly rate for billing specialists was nearly a dollar less at \$17.57, but the rate rises to \$20.61 for the combined titles of billing manager/supervisor, business office manager, coding manager/supervisor and office manager. These jobs more often tend to be salaried positions, however, with just 14%, 25%, 17% and 18% reporting hourly pay.

Single-specialty pays better than multi-specialty

For the first time in four years, the pay is better in a single-specialty practice. Previous *Coding Pro* salary surveys had shown multi-specialty practice coders earning as much as 19% more than their single-specialty colleagues. However, in 2010, single-specialty coders’



average salary (\$49,911) surpassed multi-specialty coders' average salary (\$47,688) by 4.66%.

Slightly more than 63% of this year's respondents report that they work for a single-specialty practice. See the chart on pg. 3 for a look at average salaries by specialty, as reported by respondents in select single-specialty practices. (Please note that these numbers do not include coders within multi-specialty groups.)

The size of your practice and organization doesn't necessarily affect your salary, unlike in previous years. Our 2008 survey showed a fairly steady increase in pay as the number of physicians in the practice and the number of locations in the organization increased. In 2010, you earned the highest average salary if you worked in a practice with more than 100 physicians. However, the second-highest salary went to coding professionals in a solo practice – and practices with 76-100 physicians fell at the bottom of the scale.

The number of practice locations also doesn't appear to affect your salary. While coding professionals in organizations with more than 20 practice locations lead the way in annual salary, an organization with 4-6 locations pays more than larger organizations, such as

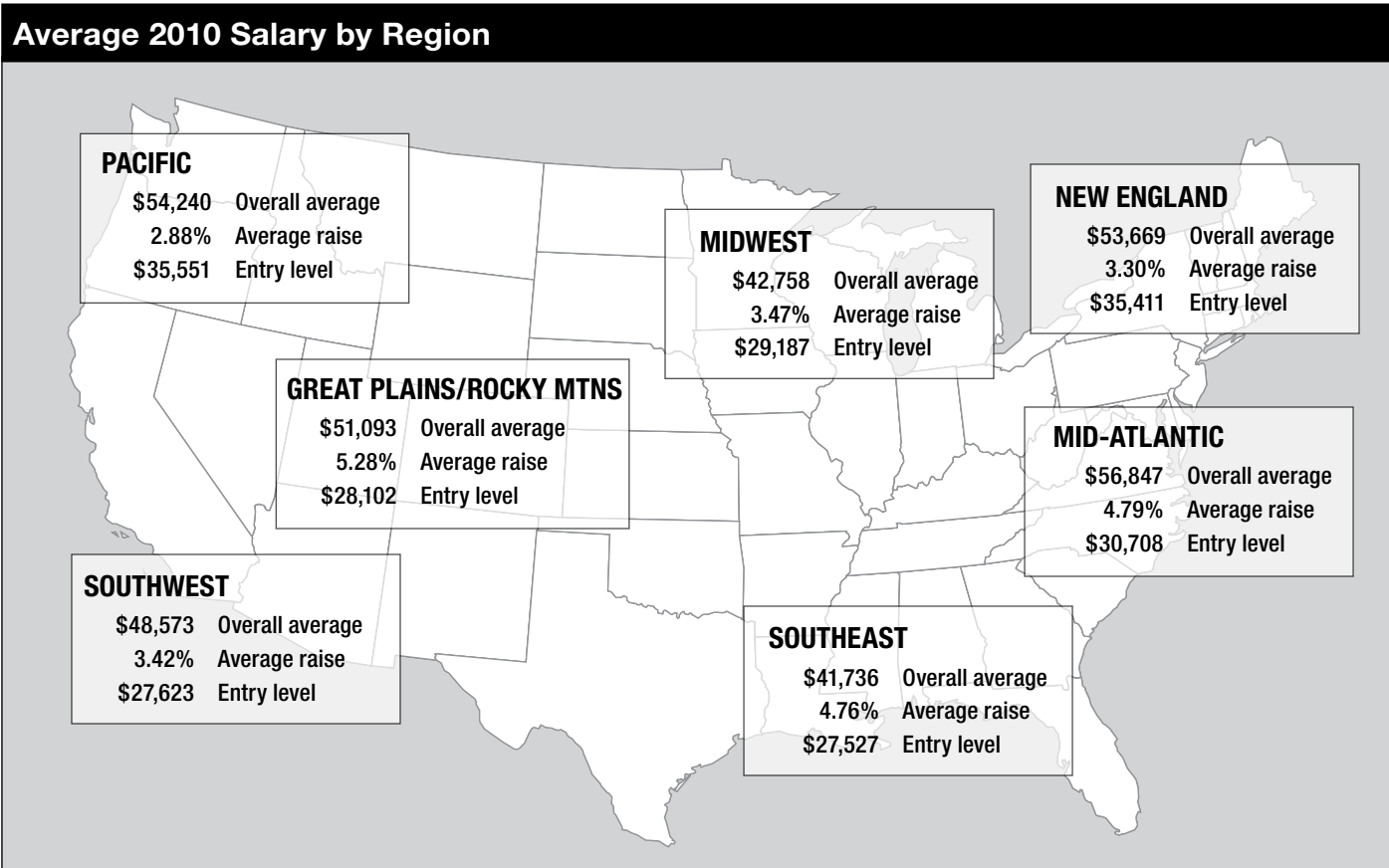
those with 11-15 locations. Coding professionals in these 11-15 location organizations reported earning the lowest annual salary.

Mid-Atlantic region sees highest pay

If you're planning to pack up your belongings and jumpstart your coding career in a new locale, you might want to consider the Mid-Atlantic (DC, DE, MD, NJ, NY, PA, VA, WV), which placed first among seven regions of the country with an overall average salary of \$56,847.

The Pacific and New England regions, both traditionally near the top of this list, finished second and third, respectively. Pacific region (AK, CA, HI, OR, WA) coding professionals earn \$54,240 on average, while New England (CT, MA, ME, NH, RI, VT) was close behind with an average of \$53,669. The Southeast region (AL, AR, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, SC, TN) finished at the bottom, averaging \$41,736 in overall annual salary.

The highest percentage of respondents, 24%, call the Midwest region (IA, IL, IN, MI, MN, MO, OH, WI) home – and earn \$42,757 on average – followed by the South-east (18% of respondents) and the Mid-Atlantic (17%).



The map on page 4 provides a look, by region, at: 1) the overall average 2010 salary; 2) the average percent raise from 2009 to 2010; and 3) the average starting salary for an entry-level coder.

Education is key to boosting your bottom line

While you can't speed the passage of time to take advantage of the increases in pay that come with experience (see chart, bottom right), education and certification are two ways you can sharply increase your pay.

The correlation between education and a higher salary is borne out in our analysis of past years of Coding Pro salary surveys. You can see in the chart, at right the steady increase in pay from respondents holding a high school diploma or GED through respondents with a post-graduate degree. If you hold a post-graduate degree (4%), you earn 73% more than your counterparts with a high school diploma or GED (18%).

Even simply taking some college courses could prove beneficial when your employer sets your salary. Respondents who've taken "some college" courses earn 12% more than those with a high school diploma or GED. The highest percentage of your colleagues, 44%, say they have "some college" education, while 17%

report holding a 2-year degree and 16% report holding a 4-year degree.

As mentioned earlier, certification is another avenue to higher pay, though to a lesser degree. While more than 70% of respondents hold a coding certification, this year's data shows the difference in pay – \$50,483 for those with a certification versus \$48,581 for those without – is less than 4%.

Note: Be sure to keep checking your Coding Pro Decisions website (www.codingprodecisions.com) for alerts as we continue to break down and analyze the data you've given us in our latest salary survey.

