

Hawkeye Highlights

Iowa AAHAM Chapter

Photo By: Steph Hultman

Summer 2012

Message from the President.....

Hopefully you are staying cool in this unusually hot, dry summer. This is one year we may be happy to see summer pass by so quickly! I would like to thank all of you for making our Spring meeting a great success. We had great attendance which is very appreciated since so many of us are trying to meet the demands of Meaningful Use at the moment.

Our agenda is in place for the Fall conference on September 13th and 14th at the Hilton Garden Inn. Early bird registration is due by September 4th and the hotel room rate will expire on August 22nd. Our featured speaker, Tony DiCecco will present our opening session on Thursday morning. His presentation is entitled "Making Every Day Count." Tony will share with us the importance of having a positive attitude and the impact of one's actions on those around them. IHA will give an update on Healthcare Reform. Payer panels will follow on Friday. I hope to see you there!

Don't forget the ANI will take place October 17th-19th in Bonita Springs, Florida at the beautiful Coconut Point Hyatt Regency Resort. The theme this year is "Changes in Latitudes, Changes in Attitudes...Taking Your Revenue Cycle to New Altitudes." Two keynotes have been selected. Christine Thielst will speak on "Social Media in Healthcare" and Jan McInnis will present on "Finding the Funny in Change." The full conference brochure is now available at www.aaham.org.

Remember to send in your ballots for the fall election if you have not already. We have four officer positions open, along with three board member positions. If you did not receive a ballot, please



Tara Spidle
Hawkeye Chapter President

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Hawkeye Chapter

Officers - Board Members - Committee Chairs

Tara Spidle	<i>President</i>
Mike Dobbs	<i>Vice President / Program Chair</i>
Connie Dudding	<i>Secretary / Registration</i>
Lisa Quillen	<i>Treasurer / Nominating Chair</i>
Luke Gruber	<i>Chairperson of the Board</i>
Rebecca Gough	<i>Board Member / Certification Chair</i>
Vera Cummings	<i>Board Member / Hawkeye Website Audit Chair</i>
Laurie Gaffney	<i>Newsletter Committee Chair</i>
Shari Mitchell	<i>Board Member Corporate Sponsorship Chair</i>
Cristie Knudsen	<i>Board Member / Legislative Chair</i>
Sara McClure	<i>Board Member / Hospitality Chair</i>
Luke Gruber	<i>Membership Chair</i>

HAWKEYE HIGHLIGHTS EDITORIAL POLICY & OBJECTIVES

The HAWKEYE HIGHLIGHTS newsletter is published four times annually by the AAHAM IOWA CHAPTER to update the membership regarding chapter and national activities as well as to provide information useful to health care administrative professionals. Opinions expressed in articles or features are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Iowa Chapter. AAHAM, the NATIONAL AAHAM organization or the editor. Reproduction and/or use of the format or content of this publication without the expressed permission of the author(s) or the editor are prohibited. © Copyright 2012.



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contact me as soon as possible. We greatly appreciate the four new folks who are running this year, Melissa Puck from Manning Regional Health Center, Marcia Taylor from Spencer Municipal Hospital, Stephanie Hultman with Avadyne Health, and Charlie Cole with Hauge Associates. Of course, I also want to thank Luke Gruber, Cristie Knudsen, Connie Dudding and Lisa LaPean (formerly Quillen) for their dedication to our chapter.

Since we last visited, my family and I traveled to Gallup, New Mexico, where my 14 year old son competed in the National Junior High Rodeo Finals. It was a wonderful experience. There was actually more rain in the desert in one week than what we have had in Iowa this summer. It is funny what a small world we live in. When mentioning this trip to fellow Hawkeye members, I discovered Shari Mitchell has an aunt that lives in Gallup and she had visited there many times.

Please consider sharing your knowledge and expertise by volunteering on one of our chapter committees. If you are interested, please contact any of our board members. As always, feel free to contact me if you have any questions about our chapter or upcoming events. ■

Respectfully,

Tara Spidle

AAHAM ANI

October 17th-19th

Bonita Springs, Florida

“Changes in Latitudes, Changes in Attitudes...Taking Your Revenue Cycle to New Altitudes”

Connect with others and expand your network with ANI events designed to maximize your opportunities for meeting a unique community of professionals who "do what you do." Enjoy this once a year, unique opportunity to network with colleagues and industry leaders from across the country, to share ideas and learn useful new solutions to your day-to-day challenges. AAHAM social events are an integral part of your learning and networking experience; a catalyst for building relationships in a fun and informative atmosphere. ■



Coconut Point Hyatt
Regency Resort

HAWKEYE CHAPTER OF AAHAM

BALANCE SHEET

TREASURER'S REPORT FOR PERIOD ENDING: 04/30/2012

ASSETS:

Cash in Bank	\$25,468.03
Certificate of Deposit #30063596	\$6,0643.97
Certificate of Deposit #30063430	\$3,220.98
TOTAL ASSETS	\$34,753.98

LIABILITIES:

Payables	\$0.00
----------	--------

EQUITY:

TOTAL LIABILITIES AND EQUITY	\$0.00
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OPERATING STATEMENT

REVENUES:

Corporate Sponsors	\$8,715.00
Interest Income	---
Registrations/Vendor Fair 2011 Spring	\$8,915.00
Registrations/Vendor Fair 2011 Fall	\$5,100.00
Registrations/Spring 2012	\$2,570.00
Certifications	\$1,610.00
Miscellaneous	\$736.76
Workshop with HFMA	\$850.00
Vendor Booth Fees	\$715.00
TOTAL REVENUE	\$29,211.76

EXPENSES:

Travel	\$7,989.94
Web Design	\$1,050.00
Insurance Fees	\$996.00
Spring Conference Speaker Fees	\$718.20
Spring Conference Facility/Hospitality Fees	\$4,228.03
Fall Conference Facility Deposit	\$258.00
Fall Conference Fees	\$4,698.62
ANI Expenses	\$932.78
Miscellaneous	\$1,144.87
Membership Dues	\$175.00
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$21,933.44
NET INCOME (LOSS)	\$7,278.32
	\$2,996.76
BEGINNING CASH BALANCE	\$18,189.71
ENDING CASH BALANCE	\$25,468.03



Respectfully,

Lisa Quillen
Chapter Treasurer

2012 AAHAM Fall Speaker Lineup

Submitted By: Mike Dobbs

The Hawkeye board has been busy arranging for a great line up of speakers this fall.

We will start off the fall conference with Tony DiCecco, former University of Northern Iowa Women's Basketball Coach, will be speaking on goal setting and what we can do to see our dreams come true!

Also, Victor Freeman from JA Thomas will speak on the importance of physician documentation and how value based purchasing will only increase the need for improved physician documentation.

Barbara Person from Baird Holm will be presenting information on the new IRS regulations that require hospitals to provide insurance type discounts to uninsured patients. Shannon Strickler will provide an update from the Iowa Hospital Association and Dennis Grindle with Seim Johnson will provide information on the "PECOS" credentialing system. We will close the conference with our usual "Payer Panel".

Hope to see you all there... should be very informative!

Making Every Day Count

Presenter: Tony DiCecco – Owner and CEO, The Tony D Connection

Right now, this moment is a very important time in all of our lives and having a passion in life helps motivate you to reach your goals and dreams. My message teaches the importance of having a positive attitude, the right work ethic and how becoming passionate in life can determine the person you become.

After hearing "Making Every Day Count." You will be able to identify:

- ***The Importance of having a positive attitude and how valuable it is throughout your lifetime***
- ***How a positive attitude can allow you to create healthy relationships with others***
- ***How one's actions can positively influence those around you***
- ***Value of having a good work ethic and the role it plays in defining you as a person***

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to reach out and make a difference. I hope you yourself are enjoying life and making every day count!

A native of Niagara Falls New York, Tony DiCecco moved to Iowa to pursue an education at Upper Iowa University. After graduating he embarked on a teaching and coaching career that lasted over 35 years. Tony D has taught and coached in many educational settings including elementary, junior high and high school as well as the college level. In 1989 Tony moved into the collegiate ranks at Creighton University where he was assistant women's basketball coach for six years.



Tony moved back to Iowa in 1995 when he was named the head women's basketball coach at the University of Northern Iowa. He went on to build a successful basketball program during his twelve year tenure; leading the Panthers to a 183-157 record. When Tony ended his coaching career he was the winningest coach in UNI's history. He ranks 7th overall in the Missouri Valley Conference in wins, and his 117 conference wins are the 4th most by a Valley coach.

After stepping down at Northern Iowa Tony began fundraising; helping build and organize numerous events for UNI athletics. His most successful event was the Rally in the Valley Dinner Auction and Fundraiser.

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Fundraising and speaking both became passions of Tony and positioned him to become the owner and CEO of “The Tony D Connection”; a motivational speaking and fundraising enterprise.

Tony hopes to make a difference by inspiring and influencing others to reach and see their dreams in life come true. Let’s Get Connected!

Improving Physician Documentation

Presenter: Victor Freeman, MD, JA Thomas & Associates

Dr. Freeman’s background provides him with the valuable experience needed to assist physicians and hospitals in addressing many challenging issues, including compliant documentation, “severity of illness” & “medical necessity” documentation, as well as range of billing and coding strategies designed to address many of the Medicare changes both current and future.

Dr. Victor Freeman is a Washington DC-based physician; with over 15 years’ experience that includes Quality Improvement, Clinical Care Delivery and Health Services Research, as well as Management/Consulting for Public/Private Hospitals & Multiple Hospital Systems, plus Leadership Roles in Advocacy for Physician Groups.

He brings a unique and diverse professional background to his current consulting work as a Regional Medical Director with J. A. Thomas & Associates. Dr. Freeman began his career as a health policy fellow in the Clinical Economics Research Unit at Georgetown University Medical Center, in Washington, DC. He has co-authored journal articles on managed care fraud, Medicaid, safety-net hospitals and cultural diversity issues. Dr. Freeman has also held leadership roles within organized medicine, including the American Medical Association and the DC Medical Society. Throughout his career, he has worked with physician offices, hospitals and academic medical centers, including a brief stint in federal government service.

Dr. Freeman’s background provides him with the valuable experience needed to assist physicians and hospitals in addressing many challenging issues, including compliant documentation, “severity of illness” & “medical necessity” documentation, as well as range of billing and coding strategies designed to address many of the Medicare changes both current and future.

Compliance Issues Related PPACA

Presenter: Barbara Person, Baird Holm

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act added section 501(r) to the IRS code which imposes additional requirements on hospital organizations in order to be exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the IRS code. Barbara will cover what hospitals will be required to do in order to be in compliance with these new regulations

Barbara E. Person is a member of the Health Care Section of the firm. She primarily represents health care clients, concentrating on corporate compliance, Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement, Medicare fraud and abuse, EMTALA, physician practice and other health business acquisition, medical staff and allied health professional issues, tax exemption, provider licensure and sanctions, physician contracts, pharmacy and nonprofit corporations.



Ms. Person is licensed to practice law in Nebraska and Iowa. She is a member of the Nebraska State Bar Association, the Iowa State Bar Association, the American Bar Association, the Omaha Bar Association and the American Health Lawyers Association. She

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served as a Board member (1993 to 1999) and as President (1997 to 1998) of the Nebraska Chapter of the Healthcare Financial Management Association. Ms. Person is included on the 2009 Great Plains Super Lawyers list and The Best Lawyers in America® 2011 (copyright 2010 by Woodward/White, Inc., Aiken, SC) list for her work in Health Care Law.

Compliance Improvement Processes

Presenter: Cynthia Swanson, Seim Johnson

This session will include a discussion regarding healthcare organizations having existing compliance programs. Information will be shared to:

- Explore strategies and tips to minimize audit exposure and decrease risks related to coding and billing issues.
- Recognize the various types of government audits being conducted and new areas of focus.
- Discuss ways to analyze the effectiveness of your compliance program.

Cynthia joined the firm in 1989 and prior to that time she had three years of hospital clinical nursing experience, five years of Quality Assurance, DRG and Utilization Review experience and five years as Supervisor of Medicare Part B Medical Review with Blue Shield of Iowa.



In 1976, Cynthia graduated with an Associate of Arts degree in Nursing from Rochester State College at Rochester, Minnesota. In May 1994, Cynthia earned her Certified Professional Coder (CPC) credentials from the American Academy of Professional Coders (AAPC). In April 2009, she became certified in Healthcare Compliance (CHC) from the HealthCare Compliance Association. In June 2009, she obtained her Certified Evaluation and Management Coder (CEMC) credentials from AAPC and in September 2010, she earned her Certified Professional Medical Auditor (CPMA) credentials from the AAPC.

In 1976, Cynthia graduated with an Associate of Arts degree in Nursing from Rochester State College at Rochester, Minnesota. In May 1994, Cynthia earned her Certified Professional Coder (CPC) credentials from the American Academy of Professional Coders (AAPC). In April 2009, she became certified in Healthcare Compliance (CHC) from the HealthCare Compliance Association. In June 2009, she obtained her Certified Evaluation and Management Coder (CEMC) credentials from AAPC and in September 2010, she earned her Certified Professional Medical Auditor (CPMA) credentials from the AAPC.

Cynthia has been responsible for formalized training on the above topics and has been involved in provider/supplier education. She has lectured on physician reimbursement matters, billing and coding issues, E/M codes, consultation services, midlevel practitioner services, split/shared services, teaching physician services, medical record documentation requirements and issues, Medicare and Medicaid fraud and abuse issues, and the implementation of an internal quality monitoring process at a local, state and national level, including AAPC Des Moines Chapter, AAPC Omaha Chapter, AAPC MOCA Chapter, Healthcare Financial Management Association, Iowa and Nebraska Medical Group Management Associations, American Academy of Professional Coders - IA and NE Chapters, United Communications Group (Part B News), Metropolitan Omaha Medical Society, Iowa Medical Society and Health Care Compliance Association.

Payor Updates

United Health Care – Paige Pettit

Veteran's Administration – Speaker Unknown

Wellmark – Luke Speltz

PECOS Training – Denis Grindle, Siem, Johnson

Medicaid Health Homes/HIT – Marni Bussel and Jodi Homes ■



Corporate Sponsors

The Iowa Hawkeye Chapter wishes to thank its Corporate Sponsors. Their generous financial contributions help ensure our chapter meets its goals and objectives, and allow us to provide educational programs, social functions, training programs for member certification, and the Hawkeye Highlights newsletter.

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Mark Your Calendars

Spring 2013 AAHAM Meeting

May 16-17, 2013

Fall 2013 AAHAM Meeting

September 19-20, 2013

Hilton Garden Inn
Des Moines / Johnston, IA



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Hawkeye AAHAM Planning Meeting

January 20, 2011

9:30am – 12:30pm

Location: AAMS

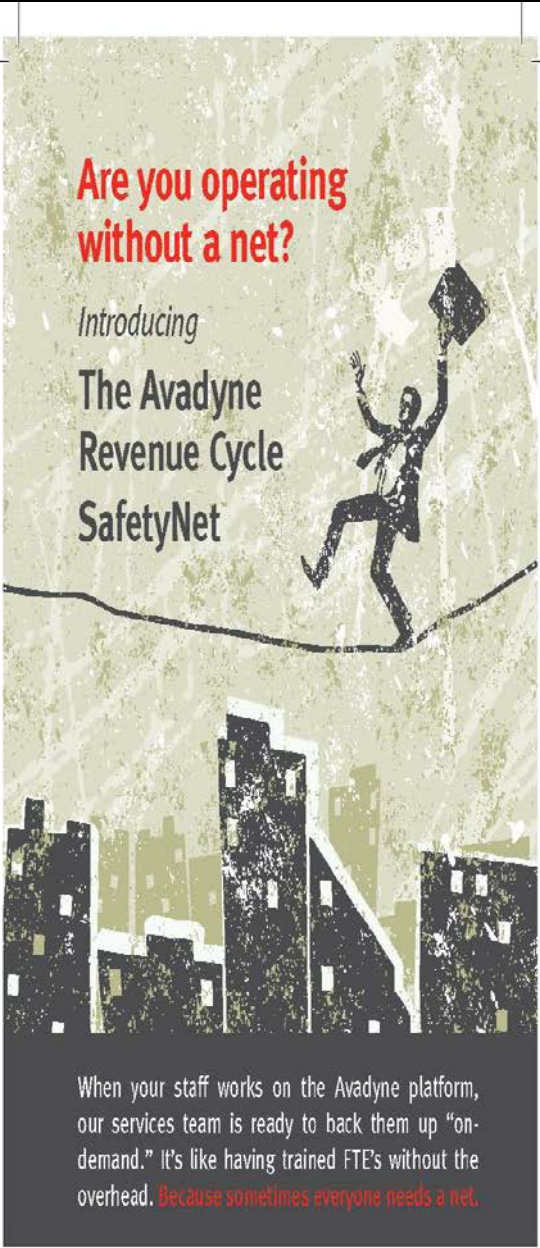
Roll Call: Tara, Lisa, Luke, Connie, Vera, Rebecca, Cristie, Shari, Sara, Tyson, Laurie, and Steph

Not attending: Mike

I. President's Report

- **National Presidents Meeting.** Update following National President's Meeting Bonita Spring resort in Florida. Secluded resort in Florida. National AAHAM reached 3000 members in 2011. Hoping to maintain in 2012. Certifications are down but since reducing the fees hoping that will start picking up again. Tara serving on National bylaws committee. All chapters except 3 were represented. Legislative days are coming up in April. Topics have not been determined at this time. ANI is in October. With the roll out of our scholarship program hopefully we will have more people able to attend.
- **Chapter Operations.** Chapter Operations Report - Study sessions 2011 dates needed. Lisa did study sessions and will forward the dates to Rebecca, Steph will touch base with the training staff and will send on to Rebecca, Tara, Lisa and Connie so reporting can happen. 111 as of December 31, 2011.
- **Chapter Excellence.** Review Chapter Excellence Grading-Did not get out, Tara will send out and then we will review and discuss in May. Covers activity until June 30.
- **Committee Chairs.** Appoint Committee Chairs-Kristina has resigned. Kiel has resigned Mike will be vice president. Legislative chair open now – Cristie stated she will take over. Advisory chair-Mike can continue. Lynn and Sara will do hospitality. Laurie and Steph on Hawkeye highlights.


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Open are President, Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary three board members. Let Tara know if members are not planning on running. Anyone can take any position, let Tara and Tyson know if planning on staying on in some capacity. Nominating chair will be Tyson, Lisa and Sara will help. Send letter out April 1st asking for people who are interested. Nominations May 30th, Ballots have to be out by July 1.

- **Bylaws.** Review Bylaws/Approve changes if needed-One change that needs to be made, Page 6 and page 10, ballots state different time frames. Need the time frames to match. Cristie will track the state members for us. Cristie made motion to have the wording changed to read, “at least 6 weeks prior.” Page 6 is listed under Article III voting regulation #5. Rebecca 2nd. Spelling needs corrected as well. Rebecca will review the spelling and send corrections to Tara. State only members will be in newsletter. Every organization needs to have at least on national member then any organization can have all billing members as state only member at 25.00 each. Adding state fee through national we will discuss at May meeting. Advertising chairperson and publicity chair person. Do we combine these two? Take these two positions out of the bylaws; we created these to go along with national. In bylaws, Hawkeye highlights states March, June, Sept December. Do we want this to say “quarterly” instead of individual month? Rebecca made motion to have Hawkeye highlights chair to publish “quarterly.” Sara 2nd. All changes will be made and the bylaws will be done for 2012 and will be good for 3 years.
- **Legislative.** Legislative Days-April 11-12th, Washington DC - In past we have sent 4 members. Legislative chair (Cristie), Vice President (Mike), President (Tara) and Chairperson of the Board (Luke). This was voted on and as long as we have financing

then we will not need to vote on this each year. Hawkeye chapter will continue to send 4. Mike is national chair so his fees will be paid by national. This will open up another person to go. We will ask who (including entire membership) is interested in going and then draw. This communication will go out fairly soon, as registration will be due soon. Meeting is in Washington. Agenda includes: Discussion topics with legislators, meet and greet, meeting on Thurs are 8:30-noon or so. Depends if visit House and Senate, allowed 5 hours to go meet congress. After meeting with House and Senate there is a 1 hour session on what was discussed, basically a report back. Friday is president meeting.

- **Secretary’s Report.** Lisa made motion to approve November minutes, Rebecca 2nd. Tara will send information on September minutes.
- **Treasurer’s Report.** -\$21,195.41 cash in bank, \$7500.00 Certificate of deposit. Lisa reported. Shari approved the treasures report, Connie 2nd.

II. Vice President’s Report

- **Spring Meeting.** Spring Meeting - Agenda Review. Still early in planning process. Jeanne Scott has penciled us in speaking time to 2 hours right now. Discussion centered on the cost for this program. Members state she comes with a different approach. She is a program draw. This is an election year. If she speaks political information do we need IHA to come? Was stated that can depend on who is presenting. Shannon or Dan could we ask them to do an Iowa update and keep Federal out since we have Jeanne Scott there. One survey stated to take out the politics. This can go either way, we do have to deal with the politics. We cannot depend on who will show up from IHA, we will go ahead and schedule.

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- **Outlook Presentation Tool.** Dan-did outlook presentation tools - \$2000.00 plus expenses – price includes to come do presentation, collection of questions, speak to topics we want to hear about and then be available after the meeting for questions. 3 hour program Crime victims-time frames, forms, etc. overall picture of this issue. Be able to take back to facilities. 1 hour presentation. Mike verified with Bill from SSI- 1 hour presentation. Iowa workers comp division-payment disputes, 1 hour presentation. Payors coming-Humana, UHC, possibly Wellmark-give a demo on Treo website. To price out a claim line item by line item.
- **Fall Meeting.** Topic Discussion
Steve - motivational speaker - Several have heard him speak prior.
Time management speaker - need to come down on fees.
Jerry Bridge fees high-time management speaker-Steph that he was negotiable on fees.
Main speaker options — Round tables (closures) Steph will ask her legal Counsel if this is something he may speak to.
Day - Mike has been in contact with Day - none of the dates work for her. Do we want to do a one day workshop? Is she enough of a big enough draw. If we hold separate we could bring staff. Observation and one day stay. Physician billing this could be rural vs non rural. Maybe we have her speak on a couple of different topics. Do we want to do a joint meeting with HFMA. We can pull case managers, UR, business office, Health information systems and clinical for this.
Jim Wicker - 5010
855 applications - Dennis is on the list for a joint meeting with HFMA.
- **Membership.** Membership 111 members. Tyson will check on that number just to double check before reporting. Renewal 75



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right now. Seven (7) new members since the beginning of the year. Tyson will let members know if he needs help calling members asking if they were planning on renewing.

- **Certification.** Certification – Rebecca reports February testing-CPAT and CCAT-16 signed up No one for CPAM or CCAM.
- **Corporate Sponsorship.** Corporate Sponsorship - Sponsors at the end of the year – 13. CBE has dropped down to gold sponsor going forward. Array is not sure they will continue to sponsor. MRA- anyone in the group use them to reach out if they will sponsor? SSI, Recondo, CDR associates. Hopefully pick up a couple more vendors. \$2400.00 in sponsorship fees that will be forwarding to Lisa.
- **Hawkeye Highlights Newsletter.** Hawkeye Highlights-Everyone appreciated the great job on the last issue. Next deadline will be Spring – should be out before our May

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meeting. Then will be July to follow up with the meeting highlights. Need all Bios for all nominated positions. For Spring newsletter - Laurie needs everything in by April 18th. Secretary minutes and Treasurers report approved today need to be sent to Laurie. We are also allowing 6 months for the scholarships for publications. Anyone submitting publications has to be submitted by June 30th. Be prepared, at the May meeting, Steph would like to take pictures of the current officers and board members so we have new pictures for website.

- **Website.** Website-Vera all ready to update website.. Board meeting agenda, spring and fall meetings, what we had planned and what we might need. Chapter excellence application - Lisa has in word document. This will be put as a PDF so we will submit electronically if at all possible. Lisa will send on a blank copy. Separate place, for all the documents. Remove MRA and Array as sponsors for now. Vendor fair is set for spring meeting. Shari will send out in April to all vendors. Tara needs to update the Presidents letter she will send this by Monday to Vera.

III. New Business

- Scholarship program-see guidelines attached. Each committee member will have to help track the portions. Send applications to Tyson and Steph will do verification of articles. Connie will verify registrations. Tyson, Steph and Connie will all assist in determining points. Vera will put on website.

IV. Old Business-No old business

Adjourned: 11:42 am ■



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Certification Passed Exams – CPAT and CCAT

Submitted By: Rebecca Gough, CPAM

Congratulations to the following people on their recent certification testing! These folks were successful in obtaining their CPAT and CCAT Certifications. The exams were taken this past May - Congratulations on a job well done!!

Passed CPAT Exam in May		Passed CCAT Exam in May	
Wendy Edwards	Boone County Hospital	Goldie Armstrong	PMD
Patricia Bengé	Avadyne Health	Lynn Brumbaugh	PMD
Dana Keller	PMD	Angie Brown	PMD
Passed CCAM Exam in April			
Stephanie Stoll		Boone County Hospital	

Upcoming Certification Testing Dates

Fall 2012 Professional CPAM/CCAM Exam Period
October 22-27, 2012

August 2012 Technical Exam Period
August 13-24, 2012

Website Alert

The Iowa Hawkeye Chapter is excited to announce our website for members at www.hawkeyeaham.org. The site includes:

Chapter officers and board members
Upcoming events-Calendar of events
Chapter Bylaws
Sponsor Information

Membership information
Link to the National AAHAM Website
Current and Past Newsletters
Photos from past meetings

Watch for more information to be added every month. Since the site is new, we are looking for any ideas for additional information from our members. Please contact board member Vera Cummings at vcummings@bchealth.info with ideas.

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Legislative Update

Submitted By: Cristie Knutson

Now that the U.S. Supreme Court has upheld the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA), work is going forward on how the law will be implemented. One of the many provisions under the law is the formation of Health Benefit Exchanges. These exchanges may have far reaching implications on how people purchase insurance and in how Medicaid coordinates benefits. The Iowa General Assembly will be working on Iowa's Health Benefit Exchange, since the federal government is requiring the exchanges to be implemented within the Medicaid program in the second half of 2013. Look for this issue to be a top priority in the next General Assembly.

Iowa has also implemented the Medical Home concept. Those of us with physician offices may wish to become better informed on this subject, as the concept is gaining a lot of support in the healthcare reform arena.

Most importantly, I want to stress that individual involvement is the most important action you can take. In this industry, we often assume that another party will protect our interests, whether that is the Iowa Hospital Association, our elected officials, or AAHAM. However, the value of relating our own experiences is overlooked in these instances. It became apparent during the Washington, D.C. trip that our elected officials want to help us but need to rely on our input to guide their steps. Listening to the CMS Rural Health Open Door Forum (ODF) also reinforces the importance of becoming involved. CMS often develops policies with an extremely limited understanding of how health care works in rural areas. The Open Door Forum provides an avenue for rural providers to share our reality directly with CMS in Baltimore. Becoming involved can be as simple as joining the teleconference. Follow this link for more information on the ODF and join the listserve to receive notifications: http://www.cms.gov/Outreach-and-Education/Outreach/OpenDoorForums/ODF_RuralHealth.html. Hope to hear you on the next one!

Customer Service Excellence

It's More Than Just a Motto

Written By: Steve Chapla, CHFP
Submitted By: Stephanie Hultman

Customer Service within the healthcare industry has become one of the most critical components supporting the delivery of care to patients. Whether in a clinical or administrative setting, with the advent of The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, HCAHPS scores, Healthcare Consumerism, and general market competition, customer service has become crucial in all aspects of patient interactions.

However, merely saying we provide excellent customer service does not suffice! Customer service needs to be more than a motto, a plaque on the wall, or words on a website. Customer service is a state of mind. It must reside in the heart and soul of an organization's culture.

All of us have experienced poor customer service at one time or another, so let's talk about how to achieve customer service excellence, as well as the actions required to be a World Class Customer Service provider. First and foremost, you must set an organizational standard that, in every encounter with a patient, you will go above and beyond what the patient expects. It is not simply answering a question or dealing with an issue. Instead, you must reach the next step: establish a level of comfort in the mind of the patient that all their needs (realized and unrealized alike) are being addressed.

Setting these substantial expectations - and maintaining the support necessary to carry them through - requires leadership. Communicate the message and expectation loud and clear:

- Post it prominently on your website that customer service is paramount.
- Post it throughout your organization and departments, where patients and staff alike will be constantly reminded of its importance.
- Reflect your commitment to world class customer service in Every communication that goes to patients: letters, billing statements, clinical reports, and so forth. Emphasize your organization's care and concern for patients and their needs.

That's the easy part. What's next is the hard part Walk the talk!

As leaders, you need to ensure that your staff has the resources to be successful. This includes outsourced processes with external vendors, which is sometimes overlooked because it is incorrectly perceived as someone else's responsibility. In reality, it is more important that external partners are just as committed (if not more committed) because of the challenges of being a separate organization. This means that customer service-related interactions need to be part of every job description. You can't simply say "I want you to provide excellent customer service" and then evaluate staff performance based on other criteria. Patient interactions need to be evaluated based on an established level of customer service that can be measured and monitored.

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Ultimately, customer service-related criteria can be used to support compensation levels. Along with revised job descriptions, you need to establish productivity measures that encompass the time required to interact with patients the very interactions necessary to provide that extra level of service you are aspiring to.

A critical aspect to achieving excellent customer service is to ensure that all staff interacting with patients demonstrates specific abilities. An empathetic-yet-calm personality lends itself to these interactions, as do solid communication skills, and what some experts have referred to as “emotional intelligence”. This means they have developed the personality characteristics as well as the emotional control to deal with extremely sensitive patient issues. It is critical to train staff to interact very empathetically (and not over-emotionally) to assist in finding solutions to issues and patient challenges.

- Remember that two of the most sensitive emotional factors that people face are health and money. Our healthcare environment places the patient in the crossfire, simultaneously dealing with both these sensitive topics; such a situation has the potential to devolve swiftly into a major customer service challenge.

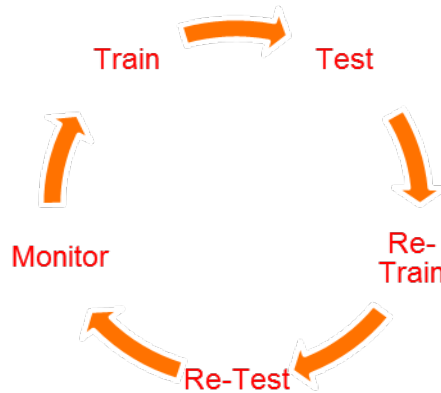
Even a 5-minute phone call allows for the building of a positive relationship with the patient. Such a relationship creates the opportunity to achieve excellent customer service. However, to achieve this you will need to recognize 4 basic personalities and/or communication styles that patient’s exhibit:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| ■ Spontaneous – likes to talk | estimated 40% of the population |
| ■ Agreeable – avoids conflict | estimated 25% of the population |
| ■ Directive – to the point | estimated 25% of the population |
| ■ Logical – wants to see data | estimated 10% of the population |

These personality types are important to identify, because correctly identifying the patient’s will best guide successful interaction with that patient. Spontaneous people will respond emotionally to points discussed, and will question rules unless they understand –and agree- with those rules. Agreeable people are people oriented; with “nurturing” and encouraging interactive style, they will respond positively. Directive types need to see the big picture, act independently, and may come across as impersonal. Finally, and least commonly, patients of the Logical type are responsible, structured, like to see facts, and follow rules. Recognizing these personalities in early interactions is not always easy, and people typically have some blend of these characteristics, and may even display different types across multiple interactions. Nevertheless, accurately identifying the closest type in a given situation –and knowing how to react and respond to the differences– can go a long way in winning consensus over a difficult situation.

Even taken together, Communication skills, emotional intelligence, and good listening abilities do not completely constitute the ideal staff member. There are additional levels of knowledge that must be mastered. These require development of technical skills and ongoing training to be knowledgeable enough to deal with the challenges that arise. Proper training is a constant and never ending circle.

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Call centers operating in healthcare facilities need to ensure that their staff is educated and trained on all the organization's current policies and procedures, as well as the healthcare industry revenue cycle and payers processes. These technical skills, along with the aforementioned empathy, communication, listening, and other interpersonal skills, are essential components of all training programs. For staff to become –and remain– proficient, following the ongoing training circle is a must.

Avadyne Health, a national healthcare revenue cycle management firm, has implemented a training model to provide specific focus in the customer service area to all patient account representatives. This model designed to enhance the patient experience and assist patients, centers around a very specific approach to each call and contact with the patient. The telephone call is guided by addressing the personal desires of the caller through this approach labeled SMART.

S.M.A.R.T.™

- **S** – Set the Tone/Actively Listen
- **M** – Meet/ Acknowledge with Care & Empathy
- **A** – Ask the Right Questions
- **R** – Resolve/ Recommend/ Resolve
- **T** – Thank the caller/ Effectively end the Call

Each call is reviewed for evaluation and training purposes and then ongoing QA is conducted and a weekly review/coaching session occurs with each rep to score the call's effectiveness towards patient resolution of the issue. Scores are tracked to monitor continued compliance and performance improvement.

To enhance your level of patient satisfaction and achieve a world class customer service operation you should ensure you have these areas addressed within your organization.

Establish and communicate your commitment to customer service

- Your organizations and department mission statement should describe your commitment to excellent customer service
- Senior leadership must endorse and publicly support the initiatives

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- Foster an environment where staff recognizes the commitment/customer service mission statements need to be visible in all work areas
- Evaluate job descriptions and requirements to support excellent customer service
- Staff performance measures need to recognize customer service initiatives
- Ensure you have the right people with the right skills in all patient contact areas
- Establish training initiative focused on customer service techniques
- Develop QA process to review staff interactions with patients
- Utilize telephone call recordings as both training opportunities as well as recognizing successful interactions with patients
- Recognize and celebrate successful customer service calls and promote the positive experiences throughout the organization

For more information on how to enhance your patient experience and achieve a world class customer service operation please contact Avadyne Health. www.avadynehealth.com

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Don't Forget AAHAM!

If you've recently had a change to your personal contact information, please let AAHAM know. If we aren't able to contact you, we can't keep you informed of all the great benefits AAHAM has to offer. So please, keep us in mind as your life changes and let us know how to reach you.

To update your AAHAM Records please contact Luke Gruber, Membership Chair by calling 515-225-0525 ext. 3, or by emailing him at lgruber@aamsonline.com. ■

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