

"Knowing the data we create plays an important part in improving patient care is the best bit of the job for me."

Michael's career in healthcare started as a ward clerk but his interest in biology soon led him to clinical coding.

Michael Jones

Coded data and standards assurance audit specialist

Employer or university

Northern Care Alliance NHS Group

Salary range

£40k-£50k



How I got into the role

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I had been working as a ward clerk for a couple of years when I was approached about an opportunity in clinical coding.

I studied biology at A-level. As it was always my favourite science subject at school, my employer thought the role might interest me.

I didn't know much about clinical coding, but talking to colleagues made me realise what a difference it makes. It seemed like a good development opportunity but I didn't realise

then it would be the most important career decision I would ever make!

I got stuck in to the role and completed all the training on offer. I passed the National Clinical Coding Qualification (NCCQ) which meant I was an accredited clinical coder (ACC). This opened doors for me and I move into an auditor role after finishing the NHS Digital Clinical Coding Auditor Programme.

I am currently working in a specialist information assurance role across a group of hospitals.

What I do

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Coding is often seen as data entry, but it's really about creating data. As a clinical coder you have the challenge of taking information about a patient's stay in hospital, often from different sources, and creating a summary, which is then translated into codes. It's like an abridged version of a story, only in a format that allows the story to be analysed and manipulated in many ways for different purposes.

As the NHS continues to move towards a digital future, the role of the clinical coder will need to adapt, which is very exciting.

I spend most of my days analysing coded data to ensure it is high quality and fit for purpose. It helps to make sure that hospitals receive the funding they need, so it's vital we get it right.

Some days I undertake routine monitoring looking for any inaccuracies in the data before correcting them. I may then carry out more in depth clinical coding audits which can help identify the root causes. I document my findings and make recommendations of necessary actions to address problems.

Some errors are due to mistakes made by clinical coders so it's important I support their development to see how things can be improved.

Others might come from data submitted by clinicians on hospital wards, in which case I provide a presentation or teaching session with clinical colleagues to try and sort those things out. I love that part of my job because I get to engage with different people across the hospitals.

The best bits and challenges

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Knowing the data we create plays an important part in improving patient care is the best bit of the job for me. I am also pleased to be able use my interest in biology in my career. It has helped me understand the medical terminology and given me more confidence.

Passing the National Clinical Coding Qualification (NCCQ) was a really important milestone in my career too. I learned a lot, and it enabled me to apply for the Clinical Coding Auditor Programme.

Life outside work

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I am lucky to have a good work/life balance. Occasionally I work on my daily commute but I also like to read a book - I enjoy a broad range of fiction and non-fiction genres - or listen to a podcast.

I also use my spare time to learn new skills. For example, I've recently taught myself to play the guitar using online software. This type of independent study is important for anyone considering a role in health informatics as it is a growing area for keeping your knowledge and skills up to date

Top tips for others

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Clinical coding is a fantastic job offering people the chance to help frontline NHS staff and patients through creation of rich data. There is a lot to learn and lots of reading, and it can sometimes be quite solitary, so you need to be self-motivated and able to work under your own steam.

Having a good understanding of medical terminology and human anatomy helps as you need to analyse the patient record and abstract necessary information. Thankfully there is some great training available for all new clinical coders.

The main skills/attributes or qualities needed for this role are:

- being accurate and taking pride in what you're doing. It's all about paying attention to those minor details that can make a massive difference.
- having an inquiring mind - clinical coders are like detectives! We often need to ask the right questions when 'interrogating' a medical record while gathering information from a number of different sources. We then piece it all together to tell the story.
- Working well under pressure - hospitals are busy places and the coding department is no exception. Being able to effectively manage your workload and produce coded clinical data on time is essential for the delivery of patient care.

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