NCRA Applauds Decision to Establish a Special SOC Code for Medical Registrars

New Code Will Vastly Improve Data Accuracy on Cancer Registrar Workforce and Salary Trends

Alexandria, VA, December 8, 2017—The National Cancer Registrars Association (NCRA) applauds the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ (BLS) decision yesterday to establish a distinct, detailed occupation code of “Health Information Technologists and Medical Registrars” in the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) system. The new detailed occupation code reflects the increased use of data to improve medical treatment and care and the critical role cancer registrars play in collecting that data. The new code will also ensure that the statistics on the cancer registry workforce will be more accurate, providing a clearer understanding of the current and future workforce needs; correct salary information will help recruit and retain qualified individuals; and skill-appropriate personnel will be hired to fill cancer registrar positions at both the central and hospital levels.

Historically, cancer registrars have been grouped under a detailed occupation code entitled “Medical Records and Health Information Technicians.” The federal definition of this occupation did not accurately describe the complex roles and responsibilities of cancer registrars or other medical registrars. In fact, the definition best described the work of medical coders.

NCRA recognized that this misclassification was impacting national workforce planning—a key purpose of data collected by the BLS. It was also impacting how facilities classified cancer registry positions, leading to recruitment and retention challenges at central and hospital registries and below-market salaries. To address the problem, NCRA embarked on an initiative to establish a distinct detailed occupation code to ensure cancer registrars and other medical registrars were classed appropriately. After a 13-year effort, success was achieved. In the 2020 Census, cancer registrars will choose a more accurate SOC classification—one that recognizes the distinct skills and responsibilities of the medical registry and health informatics professions. According to NCRA President Barbara Dearmon, BS, CTR, “NCRA is grateful that the BLS has acknowledged the important work of cancer registrars and agreed that there is a national-level role in workforce planning for our and other medical registry occupations.”

The new SOC classification for Cancer Registrars is 29-9021: Health Information Technologists and Medical Registrars. The definition is:

“Apply knowledge of healthcare and information systems to assist in the design, development, and continued modification and analysis of computerized healthcare systems. Abstract, collect, and analyze treatment and follow-up information of patients. May educate staff and assist in problem solving to promote the implementation of the healthcare information system. May design, develop, test, and implement databases with complete history, diagnosis, treatment, and health status to help monitor diseases.”

Illustrative examples: Cancer Registrar, Health Informatics Specialist, Health Information Analyst

To learn more about NCRA’s efforts to establish a new SOC classification, go to www.ncra-usa.org/Advocacy/Current-Priorities. Additional information on the 2018 Standard Occupational Classification System can be found at www.bls.gov/soc/2018/major_groups.htm.

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Chartered in 1974, the National Cancer Registrars Association (NCRA) is a non-profit organization that represents over 5,800 cancer registry professionals and Certified Tumor Registrars (CTR). The mission of NCRA is to promote education, credentialing, and advocacy for cancer registry professionals. Cancer registrars are data information specialists that capture a complete history, diagnosis, treatment, and health status for every cancer patient in the U.S. The data provide essential information to researchers, healthcare providers, and public health officials to better monitor and advance cancer treatments, conduct research, and improve cancer prevention and screening programs. For more information about NCRA, visit www.ncra-usa.org and www.CancerRegistryEducation.org.