

## TCTC Graduate Experiences Success in Medical Coding Field

**“If you think that you can, you can”**



Caroline Wolbrecht, CPC-I  
Compliance Education Coordinator

On your last visit to the doctor’s office, did you notice the physician writing a diagnosis on a chart? Did you ever wonder what becomes of this? The chart is forwarded to a specialist who understands medical terminology. After reviewing the diagnosis, they code the information digitally for review by your insurance company. Eventually, you are billed for the costs not covered by your policy.

With the tremendous expansion of health care in the past decade, and the increased scrutiny by insurance companies, there is a growing demand for workers trained in the medical coding field. This is a story about a TCTC graduate who has climbed to the head of the class. She did not have a secret code. Instead, she developed a strong sense of self confidence based on her ability to meet the challenges that she faced.

Caroline Wolbrecht is a 1984 graduate of Maplewood High School and a two year completer of the Diversified Health Occupations Program at the TCTC. Originally, she wanted to become a nurse, but changed her career plans.

She presently employed by the University of Texas as a Compliance Education Coordinator. She is responsible for creating and presenting coding compliance education to the university’s medical personnel. She also researches complex coding scenarios and performs compliance audits.

Teachers are often asked by their students, “Why do we have to learn this stuff?” Wolbrecht’s career reinforces the importance of taking full advantage of educational opportunity. She stated, “My DHO program went into great detail regarding medical terminology including Anatomy and Physiology. I became familiar with how the human body works. This helped me immeasurably because as a coder I am required to abstract from reports the surgical procedures and diagnostic codes. I can more easily communicate with my providers such as physicians,

residents and nurses.”

Wolbrecht commented on the out of classroom experiences she received at the TCTC and the dividends they provided in the future. “Our class traveled to the YMCA to assist with autistic children with aquatics instruction. We also went to nursing homes where we helped to take blood pressure, temperature, and pulses. Interacting with people in these different capacities helped in preparing me for the decision making that is part of the health care industry.” During her senior year, she worked as a co-op in the office of Dr. Lippy.

As a senior at the TCTC in 1984, Wolbrecht received the Academic Achievement Award for possessing the highest GPA in her program. She also participated in VICA [Vocational Industrial Clubs of America] where she improved her public speaking skills. “Slacking was never an option, my teachers at the TCTC taught excellence as a standard regardless of pay or function” she said.

Many students attend the TCTC to position themselves for job after graduation from high school or college. Wolbrecht was no exception. “The training I received at the TCTC combined with my national coding certification met the equivalent of a Bachelor’s degree which is a requirement for my present position. Without hesitation, I would recommend the school to others.”

After graduation from high school, she landed a position with Service Corporation International in Florida. During her five years with the company, she rotated through a series of positions from receptionist to bookkeeping. Her experience helped her to secure a position with Orlando Regional Medical Center as a floor clerk. She transcribed physician orders. She was hired by the University of Texas Health Science Center in 2006.

Tenure with a company does not guarantee a promotion. Wolbrecht has progressed from medical coding to auditing for compliance. She also conducts in-service training for workers in the field. When asked about the secrets to advancement, she stated, “You need to pass the national certification for Medical Coding and stay current with the changes that frequently occur.” Her message to young workers is a basic one. “Never say, this is not my job. You must be willing to step outside of your comfort zone. I started with the University of Texas system as a Coding Compliance Specialist, but they needed someone to prepare a power point presentation for new insurance providers. I accepted the challenge. Eventually, a new position opened for Compliance Education Coordinator and I was promoted.”

Coders in a small private practice earn \$25,000-\$30,000, but those in larger metropolitan areas have a salary range between \$60,000- \$80,000.” The job market is excellent because insurance payers are now requiring certification for their reviewers. There are opportunities for hospital coders, physicians’ coders as well as in the Medicare field.

Wolbrecht has been married to her husband David for 16 years. She lives in Deer Park, Texas. They have three children ages 10, 11 and 15.

