



# Board of Medical Specialty Coding & Compliance

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## Candidate Handbook for

- Home Care Specialist — Compliance (HCS-C)
- Home Care Coding Specialist — Diagnosis (HCS-D)
- Home Care Coding Specialist — Hospice (HCS-H)
- Home Care Clinical Specialist — OASIS (HCS-O)



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Disclaimer: The material in this electronic handbook is current with the most up-to-date information and is subject to change without notice.

# 1 About BMSC: Purpose, Mission and Core Values

## Purpose

The Board of Medical Specialty Coding & Compliance (BMSC) is the credentialing arm of the Association of Home Care Coding & Compliance (AHCC), an education and training division of DecisionHealth, LLC.

BMSC's purpose is to:

- Advance the healthcare community with an objective measurement of required knowledge and skill to ensure accurate coding and compliance.
- Promote adherence to an effective compliance plan.
- Promote the ethical and appropriate use of health information.
- Recognize that quality clinical data is a critical resource and work to assure that diagnoses used in patient records, research and health management are valid, accurate, complete, and timely.
- Enhance the validity, accuracy and completeness of patient records, research and health management by validating the knowledge and skills of home care professionals.

## Mission

BMSC leads coders, clinicians and compliance professionals across the home health and hospice continuum in advancing their professional practice and standards in the delivery of quality diagnostic coding accuracy of OASIS data set collection, and adherence to official rules and guidelines.

## Core Values

- **Quality:** Demonstrated by a commitment to the value of professional credential(s), programs, products and services
- **Integrity:** Demonstrated by openness in decision-making, honesty in communication, and ethical practices
- **Leadership:** Demonstrated by visionary thinking, responsive decisions, accountability for actions and outcomes

# 2 About BMSC Certifications

## HCS-C Certification

Home care professionals who successfully pass this certification examination will be certified by BMSC and will earn their Home Care Specialist - Compliance (HCS-C) credential.

HCS-C credential holders are professionals with specialized knowledge in establishing, implementing, and monitoring a home health agency's compliance program, specifically with state and federal regulations related to agency operations. To perform this task, credential holders must possess expertise in understanding and implementation of written policies, procedures and standards of conduct, understanding the seven elements of a compliance program, ability to administer standards through nationally recognized disciplinary guidelines, and knowledge of the OIG's standards.

### Benefits

HCS-C certified professionals are considered leaders in the industry because they:

- Administer Medicare regulations governing care delivery to beneficiaries
- Implement the elements of an effective compliance program
- Ensure that the program meets OIG standards in supporting the agency's mission of delivering quality patient care
- Provide direction and instruction to less experienced staff
- Monitor an agency's adherence to the program

The HCS-C credential is a demonstration of your compliance proficiency. Compliance certification can provide additional professional and personal recognition and reward.

As the importance of a robust compliance program increases in the home health setting, those with demonstrated proficiency will significantly increase the value they bring to their agencies. Certified Compliance Specialists are generally more highly compensated and receive greater advancement opportunities. For job applicants, certification can provide a competitive advantage, and providers are increasingly requiring compliance certification as a condition of employment.

## HCS-D Certification

Home care coders who successfully pass this certification examination will be certified by BMSC and will earn their Home Care Coding Specialist - Diagnosis (HCS-D) credential.

HCS-D credential holders are professionals skilled in classifying medical data from patient records, generally in the home health care setting. These coding practitioners review patients' records and assign alpha numeric codes for each diagnosis. To perform this task, they must possess expertise in the understanding and application of coding conventions and guidelines as outlined in the ICD-10-CM classification system. In addition, the HCS-D credential holder is knowledgeable in medical terminology, disease processes, and pharmacology. Accuracy in reporting diagnoses and conditions by a coding specialist is imperative to appropriate reimbursement and accurate data collection.

The HCS-D certification examination assesses proficiency in home health coding. Professionals experienced in home care coding should consider obtaining this certification.

### Benefits

HCS-D certified coders are considered leaders in the industry because they:

- Utilize their specialty knowledge and experience to better interact with clinicians and providers

- Understand both basic and more advanced coding principles and guidelines
- Ensure their providers receive appropriate reimbursement
- Provide direction and instruction to less experienced coders in the workplace
- Demonstrate their coding skills daily

The HCS-D credential is a demonstration of your coding proficiency. As you become more experienced in the practical requirements of home care coding, HCS-D certification can provide additional professional and personal recognition and reward.

As the importance of accurate and specific diagnosis coding increases in the home health and hospice setting, those with demonstrated proficiency will significantly increase the value they bring to their agencies. Certified coders are generally more highly compensated and receive greater advancement opportunities. For job applicants, certification can provide a competitive advantage, and providers are increasingly requiring coding certification as a condition of employment.

## HCS-H Certification

Hospice coders who successfully pass this certification examination will be certified by BMSC and will earn their Home Care Coding Specialist - Hospice (HCS-H) credential.

HCS-H credential holders are professionals skilled in classifying medical data from patient records, generally in the hospice care setting. These coding practitioners review patients' records and assign alpha numeric codes for each diagnosis. To perform this task, they must possess expertise in the understanding and application of coding conventions and guidelines as outlined in the ICD-10-CM classification system. In addition, the HCS-H credential holder is knowledgeable in medical terminology, disease processes, and pharmacology. Accuracy in reporting diagnoses and conditions by a coding specialist is imperative to appropriate reimbursement and accurate data collection.

The HCS-H certification examination assesses proficiency in hospice coding. Professionals experienced in hospice coding should consider obtaining this certification.

### Benefits

HCS-H certified coders are considered leaders in the industry because they:

- Utilize their specialty knowledge and experience to better interact with clinicians and providers
- Understand both basic and more advanced coding principles and guidelines
- Ensure their providers receive appropriate reimbursement
- Provide direction and instruction to less experienced coders in the workplace
- Demonstrate their coding skills daily

The HCS-H credential is a demonstration of your coding proficiency. As you become more experienced in the practical requirements of hospice coding, HCS-H certification can provide additional professional and personal recognition and reward.

As the importance of accurate and specific diagnosis coding increases in the home health and hospice setting, those with demonstrated proficiency will significantly increase the value they bring to their agencies. Certified coders are generally more highly compensated and receive greater advancement opportunities. For job applicants, certification can provide a competitive advantage, and providers are increasingly requiring coding certification as a condition of employment.

## HCS-O Certification

Home care professionals who successfully pass this certification examination will be certified by BMSC and will earn their Home Care Clinical Specialist - OASIS (HCS-O) credential.

HCS-O credential holders are professionals with specialized knowledge in applying clinical assessment findings to Medicare specific data collection items. To perform this task, they must possess and demonstrate expertise in the understanding and application of Medicare instruction contained in the OASIS guidance manual and Category specific Questions and Answers quarterly updates. Quality outcomes and payment are derived from data in the OASIS assessment, therefore its accuracy is imperative for patient care and agency viability, in terms of financial health and compliance with regulations.

The HCS-O certification examination assesses proficiency in home health assessment findings and Medicare specific data collection items.

Professionals experienced in OASIS knowledge should consider obtaining this certification.

### Benefits

HCS-O certified professionals are considered leaders in the industry because they:

- Utilize their specialty knowledge and experience to better interact with colleagues, clinicians and providers
- Understand both basic and more advanced OASIS principles and guidelines
- Ensure their providers receive appropriate reimbursement
- Provide direction and instruction to less experienced OASIS professionals in the workplace
- Demonstrate their documentation skills daily

As the importance of accurate and thorough Medicare documentation increases in the home health and hospice setting, those with demonstrated proficiency will significantly increase the value they bring to their agencies. Certified OASIS Specialists are generally more highly compensated and receive greater advancement opportunities. For job applicants, certification can provide a competitive advantage, and providers are increasingly requiring OASIS certification as a condition of employment.

# 3 Determining if you are ready to take a BMSC Exam

## Eligibility and Qualifications for the HCS-C Exam

- To be eligible to sit for the Home Care Specialist – Compliance (HCS-C) certification examination, candidates must have earned, at a minimum, a high school diploma or have an equivalent background.
- BMSC *recommends* that candidates have at least a two-years of experience before pursuing the HCS-C Certification.
- Candidates should have a working knowledge of implementing and administering the elements of an effective compliance program
- If you believe that your combination of education, experience and expertise qualifies you as a Home Care Compliance Specialist, then we invite you to sit for a HCS-C certification examination.
- BMSC does not discriminate against any applicant. All applicants for examinations will be judged only on published criteria for eligibility.

### Examination Philosophy

BMSC exams are designed to test the day-in, day-out skills of the professional. As a result, many compliance scenarios appear on the exam, as well as the crucial subject areas of the seven elements of a compliance program, OIG standards and CMS guidance. This is the premier nationwide certification created by compliance subject matter experts for compliance practitioners. BMSC's goal isn't to stump you with trick questions on situations you will likely never see, but rather to ensure – for you and for your employer – that you have achieved proficiency in home care compliance application.

The HCS-C examination focuses on the critical regulatory, legal and ethical issues specific to compliance in home care including:

- Administering Medicare regulations
- Implementing the elements of an effective compliance program
- Ensuring the program meets OIG standards
- Collaborating with colleagues, clinicians and providers
- Adhering to legal and ethical standards

## Eligibility and Qualifications for the HCS-D Exam

The HCS-D exam assesses your proficiency in coding specifically for home care.

To be eligible to sit for the Home Care Coding Specialist-Diagnosis (HCS-D) certification examination, candidates must have earned a high school diploma from a United States high school, or have an equivalent background. Although not required, it is strongly recommended that candidates have at least two years of on-the-job experience in:

- Home care coding for multiple case types (for example, circulatory, neoplasms, genitourinary, musculoskeletal, respiratory, endocrine, nutritional, metabolic diseases, and immunity disorders)

AND

- Completed coursework in anatomy, physiology, medical terminology, pathophysiology, and pharmacology, or demonstrate proficiency in these areas

Our most successful candidates usually have at least two years coding in home care. HCS-D credential holders must be able to apply codes and coding concepts in a testing situation. This is not an exam where you can sit through an education class, then take and pass the exam. It is a skills-based exam, which is why we recommend several years of coding experience. The test may include scenarios with multiple conditions, aftercare situations, co-morbidities and complications, for example.

If you believe that your combination of education, experience and expertise qualifies you as a home care coding specialist, then we invite you to sit for the HCS-D certification examination.

BMSC does not discriminate against any applicant. All applicants for examinations will be judged only on published criteria for eligibility.

### Examination Philosophy

BMSC exams are designed to test the day-in, day-out coding skills of the professional coder. As a result, many coding scenarios appear on the exam, as well as the crucial subject areas of coding conventions and guidelines. Our goal isn't to stump you with trick questions on conditions you will likely never see, but rather to ensure – for you and for your employer – that you have, in fact, achieved proficiency in home care coding.

The HCS-D examination focuses on the critical diagnosis coding, documentation, legal and ethical issues specific to home care including:

- Most frequently billed home health conditions and proper assignment of diagnoses
- Accurately assigning codes that represent factors influencing health status
- Conventions and guidelines for home health diagnosis coding (such as manifestation codes)
- Correct usage of combination codes
- Correct assignment of primary, secondary and other diagnoses
- ICD-10-CM code sequencing and knowledge of medical terminology
- Knowledge of anatomy and physiology
- Adherence to legal and ethical standards

### Eligibility and Qualifications for the HCS-H Exam

The HCS-H exam assesses your proficiency in coding specifically for hospice.

To be eligible to sit for the Home Care Coding Specialist-Hospice (HCS-H) certification examination, candidates must have earned a high school diploma from a United States high school, or have an equivalent background. Although not required, it is strongly recommended that candidates have at least two years of on-the-job experience in:

- Hospice coding for multiple case types (for example, circulatory, neoplasms, genitourinary, musculoskeletal, respiratory, endocrine, nutritional, metabolic diseases, and immunity disorders)
- AND
- Completed coursework in anatomy, physiology, medical terminology, pathophysiology, and pharmacology, or demonstrate proficiency in these areas

Our most successful candidates usually have at least two years coding in hospice. HCS-H credential holders must be able to apply codes and coding concepts in a testing situation. This is not an exam where you can sit through an education class, then take and pass the exam. It is a skills-based exam, which is why we recommend several years of coding experience. The test may include scenarios with multiple conditions, co-morbidities and complications, for example.



If you believe that your combination of education, experience and expertise qualifies you as a hospice coding specialist, then we invite you to sit for a HCS-H certification examination.

BMSC does not discriminate against any applicant. All applicants for examinations will be judged only on published criteria for eligibility.

### Examination Philosophy

BMSC exams are designed to test the day-in, day-out coding skills of the professional coder. As a result, many coding scenarios appear on the exam, as well as the crucial subject areas of coding conventions and guidelines. Our goal isn't to stump you with trick questions on conditions you will likely never see, but rather to ensure – for you and for your employer – that you have, in fact, achieved proficiency in hospice coding.

The HCS-H examination focuses on the critical diagnosis coding, documentation, legal and ethical issues specific to hospice:

- Most frequently billed hospice conditions and proper sequencing of diagnoses
- Accurately assigning codes that represent factors influencing health status
- Conventions and guidelines for hospice diagnosis coding (such as manifestation codes)
- Correct usage of combination codes
- Correct assignment of primary and secondary diagnoses
- Knowledge of medical terminology
- Knowledge of anatomy and physiology
- Adherence to legal and ethical standards

### Eligibility and Qualifications for the HCS-O Exam

- To be eligible to sit for the Home Care Clinical Specialist-OASIS (HCS-O) certification examination, candidates must have earned, at a minimum, a high school diploma or have an equivalent background.
- BMSC *recommends* that candidates have at least a two-year degree before pursuing the HCS-O Certification.
- Candidates should have a working knowledge of medical terminology, pathophysiology, pharmacology, anatomy and physiology in order to comprehend and apply clinical information.
- BMSC *recommends* that candidates have at least two years of on-the-job experience in home care assessment and OASIS application or quality assurance related to OASIS comprehensive assessments.
- If you believe that your combination of education, experience and expertise qualifies you as a home care OASIS Specialist, then we invite you to sit for a HCS-O certification examination.
- BMSC does not discriminate against any applicant. All applicants for examinations will be judged only on published criteria for eligibility.

### Examination Philosophy

BMSC exams are designed to test the day-in, day-out skills of the professional. As a result, many OASIS scenarios appear on the exam, as well as the crucial subject areas of OASIS and CMS guidance. This is the premier nationwide certification created by OASIS subject matter experts for OASIS practitioners. BMSC's goal isn't to stump you with trick questions on conditions you will likely never see, but rather to ensure – for you and for your employer – that you have achieved proficiency in home care OASIS application.

The HCS-O examination focuses on:

- Gathering patient clinical documentation, validating the accuracy of OASIS responses and correcting OASIS response errors according to OASIS guidance and documentation standards
- Collaboration with colleagues, clinicians and providers
- Adherence to legal and ethical standards

# 4 Preparing for BMSC certification

## Preparing for HCS-C certification

### Study Process and Materials

Because the HCS-C exams are skill-based, a professional doing excellent work every day should be prepared for the exam without the need for additional study. We do, however, recognize people's desires for reference materials to brush up on skills and concepts.

BMSC publishes various study resources, including a study guide specific to HCS-C certification with examples and sample questions. In conjunction with our publishing partner, DecisionHealth®, we offer a larger resource book that follows the regulatory guidance and also offers sample questions. BMSC recommends the following products as optional tools to help with examination preparation:

- Study Guide for HCS-C Certification
- Home Health Conditions of Participation (CoPs) Answers

*\* The candidate is not required to utilize any of the above tools in order to sit for the exam.*

### Test Format

- The HCS-C examination is comprised of 80 multiple choice questions.
- The HCS-C examination is administered via a computer based testing center or paper-based testing. Paper-based testing is **only** administered at a BMSC pre-approved live event.
- The allotted time to complete the HCS-C examination is 3.0 hours. It may take some candidates less than the allotted time to complete the examination.
- There are no scheduled breaks during the examination, although you are allowed to take a break if needed. If you take a break, your exam clock continues to count down.

### Items Allowed with the Examination

**You must bring the following with you to the HCS-C exam.**

- Two forms of identification; one form must be a government issued photo ID

**There are no allowable resources permitted in the testing room for the HCS-C examination.**

- Electronic devices are *NOT* allowed in the testing room.
- Candidates will receive two sheets of scratch paper prior to beginning the examination. Scratch paper will be collected and counted from candidate prior to candidate leaving the testing area.

### HCS-C Exam Blueprint

The current HCS-C exam contains content based on guidance and regulations in effect as of Jan. 1, 2020.

The following domains outline the primary areas by which the examination questions are constructed. These domains were identified in BMSC's analysis as the primary competencies of a home health compliance specialist.

#### Domain I: Written Policies and Procedures (14%)

Tasks associated with this domain include:

- Assure you have written policies and procedures and/or standards of conduct that include, but are not limited to:
  - Articulating the organization's commitment to comply with all applicable federal and state standards.

- Describing compliance expectations as identified in the standards of conduct.
- Providing guidance to employees and others on dealing with potential compliance issues.
- Identifying how to communicate compliance issues to appropriate compliance personnel.
- Distributing standards of conduct and related policies and procedures to employees within 90 days of hire, when there are updates and annually thereafter.

### **Domain II: Oversight (21%)**

Tasks associated with this domain include:

- Assure the compliance officer chosen has required resources including a compliance committee.
- Assure the compliance officer has access to administrative staff and the board of directors.
- Assure the board allocates sufficient funding and staff so that the compliance officer can effectively perform.
- Ensure adequate coordination and training for members.

### **Domain III: Training and Education (19%)**

Tasks associated with this domain include:

- Establish, implement and provide effective training and education addressing compliance for all employees including contractors and the board of directors.
- Be certain to maintain records that show all employees and contractors are aware of Medicare requirements related to their job function.
- Be certain to provide special training based on compliance risks on the staff's individual job function.

### **Domain IV: Lines of Communication (6%)**

Tasks associated with this domain include:

- Ensure standards of conduct require employees and members of the board of directors report compliance concerns to the compliance officer.
- Ensure lines of communication allow for anonymous reporting and maintain confidentiality as much as possible.
- Ensure notification systems are well-publicized throughout the agency and your contractors.

### **Domain V: Monitoring and Auditing (15%)**

Tasks associated with this domain include:

- Assure the agency has resources available that are devoted to audit functions with current compliance risks and resources.
- Monitor regular reporting from individuals conducting auditing activities that show the effectiveness of corrective actions taken.
- Periodically re-evaluate the accuracy of a baseline risk assessment.

## Domain VI: Enforcing Standards/Discipline (11%)

Tasks associated with this domain include:

- Write policies that include written statements defining the levels of disciplinary actions that may be imposed upon staff members. Policies should specify that disciplinary action should be taken with any employee acting to impede in any part of an investigation complying with standards and policies.
- Assure employees are aware that disciplinary action will be fair and equitable.

## Domain VII: Response and Correction (14%)

Tasks associated with this domain include:

- Have a system in place where the agency can make reasonable inquiry into all compliance incidents or issues.
- Assure you have policies outlining just how to take appropriate corrective action that:
  - Are designed to correct and prevent future non-compliance, including a root cause analysis;
  - Are tailored to address the problem or deficiency identified;
  - Include timeframes for specific actions to be taken;
  - and assure the agency maintains thorough documentation of all compliance deficiencies identified and corrective actions taken.

## Preparing for HCS-D certification

### Study Process and Materials

Because the HCS-D exams are skill-based, a coder doing excellent work every day should be prepared for the exam without the need for additional study. We do, however, recognize people's desires for reference materials to brush up on skills and concepts.

BMSC publishes various study resources, including a study guide specific to HCS-D certification with dozens of examples and sample questions. In conjunction with our publishing partner, DecisionHealth®, we offer a larger resource book that follows the coding manual chapters and also offers sample questions. BMSC recommends the following products as optional tools to help with examination preparation:

- Study Guide for HCS-D Certification
- Home Health ICD-10-CM Diagnosis Coding Answer Book, current edition
- Annual Home Health Coding Summit
- Complete Home Health ICD-10-CM Diagnosis Coding Manual, current version
- DecisionHealth's Ultimate Coding & OASIS Training series

*\* The candidate is not required to utilize any of the above tools in order to sit for the exam.*

### Test Format

The HCS-D ICD-10-CM examination is comprised of 80 multiple choice questions.

The HCS-D certification examination is administered via a computer based testing center or paper-based testing. Paper-based testing is only administered at a BMSC pre-approved live event.

The allotted time to complete the HCS-D ICD-10-CM examination is 3.5 hours. It may take some candidates less than the allotted time to complete the examination.

There are no scheduled breaks during the examination, although you are allowed to take a break if needed. If you take a break, your exam clock continues to count down.

## Items Allowed with the Examination

You must bring the following resources with you to the HCS-D exam. No other resources will be allowed for the examination.

- Two forms of identification; one form must be a government issued photo ID
- Current coding manual

You may take only **ONE** of the following manuals into the testing room:

- *Complete Home Health ICD-10-CM Diagnosis Coding Manual, 2021*. Available for purchase in the DecisionHealth [online store](#).
- *Complete Home Health ICD-10-CM Diagnosis Coding Manual, 2020\**
- Any other vendor's ICD-10 coding manual (2020 or 2021 Edition)

In addition to the above referenced coding manual, **for the HCS-D exam**, you may take the FY2021 official guidelines provided [here](#) into the testing room. Please note, only the watermarked guidelines provided through this link will be allowed into the testing room as an additional resource.

\*Note, BMSC recommends a current code year, 2021, coding manual be used when taking the HCS-D exam.

Electronic code look-up systems are NOT allowed in the testing room. A hard copy coding manual is the only allowable resource

The hard copy coding manual may have tabular section dividers (A through Z) that are affixed

Post-It notes, loose papers or any other papers attached by any means are NOT allowed

Annotations written on the watermarked guidelines and the coding manual pages including the 'notes' pages at the back of the manual are allowed BUT must be free of any notes containing coding rules and guidelines from other reference materials (for example, Coding Clinic, Home Health ICD-10-CM Coding Answers and similar materials)

The testing center staff (proctor) reserves the right to deny watermarked guidelines and code books that contain excessive writing and information that may give the candidate an unfair advantage.

You may not share reference books with other test takers

Extra copies of the coding manual will not be provided

All watermarked guidelines and coding manuals will be inspected prior to admittance to the testing area

All watermarked guidelines and coding manuals will be inspected prior to candidate's leaving the testing area, to ensure no test questions or answers have been recorded.

Candidates will receive two sheets of scratch paper prior to beginning the examination. Scratch paper will be collected and counted from candidate prior to candidate leaving the testing area.

## HCS-D Exam Blueprint

The current HCS-D exam contains content based on CMS regulations, the ICD-10-CM code set, the ICD-10-CM Official Coding Guidelines, and AHA *Coding Clinic* guidance that were effective Oct. 1, 2021.

The following is the examination blueprint for the HCS-D certification examination. The Domains outline the primary areas by which the examination questions are constructed.

**Domain I: Collect patient documentation (10%)**

Tasks associated with this domain include:

- Obtain patient documentation
- Ensure the completeness of the patient documentation

**Domain II: Assign accurate diagnosis codes (65%)**

Tasks associated with this domain include:

- Review diagnosis codes
- Assign accurate diagnosis codes from the classification system
- Sequence the diagnosis codes
- Validate diagnosis codes using coding conventions and guidelines
- Ensure that the patient documentation supports the assigned codes

**Domain III: Collaborate with clinicians, physicians and/or managers/administrators (10%)**

Tasks associated with this domain include:

- Query clinicians, physicians, or managers/administrators about incomplete information, additional information, or documentation deficiencies
- Obtain clinician agreement with code assignment and sequencing
- Train clinicians, physicians and/or managers/administrators about changes to coding protocols

**Domain IV: Ensure that all activities are done in a legal and ethical manner that supports agency policy, regulatory and professional guidelines (15%)**

- Maintain patient confidentiality, privacy, and security
- Conduct activities in a legal, ethical, and professional manner
- Archive and retrieve patient documentation related to the medical record

**Preparing for HCS-H certification****Study Process and Materials**

Because the HCS-H exams are skill-based, a coder doing excellent work every day should be prepared for the exam without the need for additional study. We do, however, recognize people's desires for reference materials to brush up on skills and concepts.

BMSC publishes various study resources, including a study guide specific to HCS-H certification with examples and sample questions. In conjunction with our publishing partner, DecisionHealth®, we offer a larger resource book that follows the coding manual chapters and also offers sample questions. BMSC recommends the following products as optional tools to help with examination preparation:

- Study Guide for HCS-H Certification
- Annual Home Health Coding Summit
- Complete Home Health ICD-10-CM Diagnosis Coding Manual, current version

*\* The candidate is not required to utilize any of the above tools in order to sit for the exam.*

## Test Format

The HCS-H examination is comprised of 80 multiple choice questions.

The HCS-H certification examination is administered via a computer based testing center or paper-based testing. Paper-based testing is only administered at a BMSC pre-approved live event.

The allotted time to complete the HCS-H examination is 3.0 hours. It may take some candidates less than the allotted time to complete the examination.

There are no scheduled breaks during the examination, although you are allowed to take a break if needed. If you take a break, your exam clock continues to count down.

## Items Allowed with the Examination

**You must bring the following resources with you to the HCS-H exam. No other resources will be allowed for the examination.**

- Two forms of identification; one form must be a government issued photo ID
- Current coding manual

**You may take only ONE of the following manuals into the testing room:**

- *Complete Home Health ICD-10-CM Diagnosis Coding Manual, 2021*. Available for purchase in the DecisionHealth [online store](#).
- *Complete Home Health ICD-10-CM Diagnosis Coding Manual, 2020\**
- Any other vendor's ICD-10 coding manual (2020 or 2021 Edition)

In addition to the above referenced coding manual, **for the HCS-H exam**, you may take the FY2021 official guidelines provided [here](#) into the testing room. Please note, only the watermarked guidelines provided through this link will be allowed into the testing room as an additional resource.

\*Note, BMSC recommends a current code year, 2021, coding manual be used when taking the HCS-H exam.

Electronic code look-up systems are NOT allowed in the testing room. A hard copy coding manual is the only allowable resource

A hard copy coding manual and watermarked guidelines are the only allowable resources

Post-It notes, loose papers or any other papers attached by any means are NOT allowed

Annotations written on the watermarked guidelines and the coding manual pages including the 'notes' pages at the back of the manual are allowed BUT must be free of any notes containing coding rules and guidelines from other reference materials (for example, Coding Clinic, Home Health ICD-10-CM Coding Answers and similar materials)

The testing center staff (proctor) reserves the right to deny watermarked guidelines and the code books that contain excessive writing and information that may give the candidate an unfair advantage.

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## HCS-H Exam Blueprint

The current HCS-H exam contains content based on CMS regulations, the ICD-10-CM code set, the ICD-10-CM Official Coding Guidelines, and AHA *Coding Clinic* guidance that were effective Oct. 1, 2021.

The following is the examination blueprint for the HCS-H certification examination. The Domains outline the primary areas by which the examination questions are constructed.

### Domain I: Collect patient documentation (8%)

Tasks associated with this domain include:

- Obtain patient documentation
- Ensure the completeness of the patient documentation

### Domain II: Assign accurate diagnosis codes (71%)

Tasks associated with this domain include:

- Review diagnosis codes
- Assign accurate diagnosis codes from the classification system
- Sequence the diagnosis codes
- Determine the terminal diagnosis that will be listed according to CMS guidelines
- Validate diagnosis codes using coding conventions and guidelines
- Ensure that the patient documentation supports the assigned codes

### Domain III: Collaborate with clinicians, physicians and/or managers/administrators (11%)

Tasks associated with this domain include:

- Query clinicians, physicians, or managers/administrators about incomplete information, additional information, or documentation deficiencies
- Obtain clinician agreement with code assignment and sequencing
- Train clinicians, physicians and/or managers/administrators about changes to coding protocols

### Domain IV: Ensure that all activities are done in a legal and ethical manner that supports agency policy, regulatory and professional guidelines (10%)

- Maintain patient confidentiality, privacy, and security
- Conduct activities in a legal, ethical, and professional manner
- Archive and retrieve patient documentation related to the medical record

## Preparing for HCS-O certification

### Study Process and Materials

Because the HCS-O exams are skill-based, a professional doing excellent work every day should be prepared for the exam without the need for additional study. We do, however, recognize people's desires for reference materials to brush up on skills and concepts.

BMSC publishes various study resources, including a study guide specific to HCS-O certification with dozens of examples and sample questions. In conjunction with our publishing partner, DecisionHealth®, we offer a larger resource book that follows the CMS OASIS guidance and also

offers sample questions. BMSC recommends the following products as *optional* tools to help with examination preparation:

- Study Guide for HCS-O Certification
- OASIS Form Companion Guide

*\* The candidate is not required to utilize any of the above tools in order to sit for the exam.*

## Test Format

The HCS-O examination is comprised of 80 multiple choice questions.

The HCS-O examination is administered via a computer based testing center or paper-based testing. Paper-based testing is **only** administered at a BMSC pre-approved live event.

The allotted time to complete the HCS-O examination is 3.0 hours. It may take some candidates less than the allotted time to complete the examination.

There are no scheduled breaks during the examination, although you are allowed to take a break if needed. If you take a break, your exam clock continues to count down.

## Items Allowed with the Examination

You must bring the following with you to the HCS-O exam.

- Two forms of identification; one form must be a government issued photo ID

You may bring the following resources with you to the HCS-O exam. No other resources will be allowed for the examination.

- OASIS Assessment form
- Chapter 3 of OASIS Guidance Manual
- Wound Ostomy Continence Nurses Society Guidance on OASIS Integumentary Items
- OASIS Considerations for Medicare PDGM Patients
- CMS Quarterly Q&As

The above resource materials are available for purchase as a complete binder entitled: The OASIS Form Companion **The candidate may supplement this guide with the published quarterly Q&As. Version year 2020 or 2021 is acceptable.** See the DecisionHealth [online store](#) for details.

In lieu of purchasing the OASIS Form Companion Guide, the candidate may download the materials from various regulatory sites; however, the materials **MUST** be clearly labeled and bound in **ONE** binder

Or the candidate may bring any other vendor's OASIS resource book with the above stated sections (current edition)

If the proctor at a live event or a computer based testing center cannot clearly identify the allowable resources, the candidate will not be allowed to take the resources into the testing room.

Electronic devices are **NOT** allowed in the testing room. A hard copy resource is the *only* allowable resource

Post-It notes, loose papers or any other papers attached by any means are **NOT** allowed

The testing center staff (proctor) reserves the right to deny reference materials that contain excessive writing and information that may give the candidate an unfair advantage.

You may not share reference books with other test takers

Extra copies of the allowable resources will not be provided

All reference material will be inspected prior to admittance to the testing area

All reference material will be inspected prior to candidate's leaving the testing area, to ensure no test questions or answers have been recorded.

Candidates will receive two sheets of scratch paper prior to beginning the examination. Scratch paper will be collected and counted from candidate prior to candidate leaving the testing area.

## **HCS-O Exam Blueprint**

The current HCS-O exam contains content based on the OASIS-D1, CMS guidance, and Quarterly Q&As that were effective Jan. 1, 2021.

The following is the examination blueprint for the HCS-O certification examination. The Domains outline the primary areas by which the examination questions are constructed.

### **Domain I: Gather patient clinical documentation (35%)**

Tasks associated with this domain include:

- Obtain comprehensive assessment including drug regimen review
- Obtain any additional summaries such as discharge summaries and other documentation provided by physician and or facility
- Obtain any prior agency documentation from previous encounters
- Ensure the completeness of the patient documentation

### **Domain II: Validate the accuracy of OASIS responses (40%)**

Tasks associated with this domain include:

- Apply the basic rationale behind OASIS guidance
- Identify the correct OASIS responses based on the comprehensive assessment
- Ensure that the patient documentation supports the OASIS responses
- Ensure the comprehensive assessment is based on the OASIS guidelines and resources
- Access official OASIS guidance as needed

### **Domain III: Correct OASIS response errors according to OASIS guidance and documentation standards (25%)**

Tasks associated with this domain include:

- Identify errors in OASIS responses
- Obtain clinician agreement on modifications to the OASIS responses
- Correct response errors in the absence of the assessing clinician
- Maintain the documentation of corrections

## 5 How to Register for a BMSC Certification Examination

Please see the AHCC website for details about how to register for a BMSC exam. You'll find registration details and more under Certification and Training / BMSC Credentials / Exam Information or at <https://ahcc.decisionhealth.com/bmsc-exam-information>

### **BMSC Exam Refund, Extension, & Cancellation Policy**

Please see the AHCC website for details about our Refund, Extension, and Cancellation Policy and Fees. You'll find these details and more under Certification and Training / BMSC Credentials / Fees or at <https://ahcc.decisionhealth.com/fees>

## 6 Test Day

Candidates taking the test at a live event or computer based testing center should report to the testing site 30 minutes before the exam start time to be signed in and have your reference materials checked. A government-issued photo ID is required for sign-in. Pencils and scratch paper will be provided. Once you enter the testing room, you should not leave until the exam has finished.

Before the exam is administered, the proctor will review the exam rules to follow while the test is in progress.

There are no scheduled bathroom breaks during the exam. If a candidate leaves, the break is allowed, but time does not stop.

### Behavior Not Allowed

Candidates who partake in any of the following types of behavior will be dismissed from the test-taking venue and the scores will not be validated. Examples of misconduct include, but are not limited to

- Using electronic communication equipment (for example calculator, cell phones, electronic code look up systems)
- Giving or receiving help during the examination
- Committing fraud by attempting to take the exam for someone else
- Using notes or aids that are not allowed
- Attempting to copy or remove test materials
- Engaging in abusive, disturbing or uncooperative behavior.

### Testing Issues

Occasionally, testing irregularities, including but not limited to administrative errors, unauthorized availability of test content or disruptions in test administration, occur and must be dealt with.

If a testing issue occurs, BMSC will perform an investigation. BMSC may opt to score the test or invalidate the test score. When appropriate, BMSC will give (eligible) affected test-takers the opportunity to retake the exam as soon as possible. Affected candidates will be told the reason for the cancellation of their test and options for retest.

### Notification of Examination Results

Candidates who take their examination at a live event will receive a results letter via USPS within 6 weeks of taking their examination. Candidates who take their examination at a computer based testing center will receive a pass/fail result and score report immediately following the examination.

Each question on a BMSC certification examination is mapped to a domain item on the examination test blueprint. Every candidate should receive a copy of their score report from their examination. The score report provides the candidate's (raw score) number of questions answered correctly on the examination, as well as the percentage of questions answered correctly within each content area. This score report will assist candidates in evaluating their performance and identifying areas of competency and deficiency.

BMSC is responsible for the validity and integrity of the scores reported. Occasionally, computer malfunctions or candidate misconduct may cause a score report to be suspect. BMSC reserves the right to void or withhold examination results if, upon investigation, violation of BMSC's regulations is discovered. Candidates are expected to fully cooperate with any investigation. Please see the appeals section of this handbook for more detailed information.

In order to protect the integrity of the examination, BMSC will not release a candidate's specific answers to items on the certification examination, nor will BMSC discuss rationale for correct answers to examination items on the certification examination.

# 7 After the examination

## Successful candidates:

- Become BMSC certified.
- Receive a congratulatory letter and certificate of recognition of their status.
- Receive a credential lapel pin.
- Receive a score report identifying how you performed in each competency area.
- Will be listed in the Directory of Certified Credential Holders on the AHCC website.

## Unsuccessful candidates:

- Receive an email stating that you were not successful in your attempt to earn the BMSC credential.
- Receive a score report identifying how you performed in each competency area.
  - Candidates taking the exam at a testing center will receive the score report immediately upon exam completion.
  - Candidates taking the exam at a BMSC-approved live event will receive the score report via USPS within 6 weeks of taking the exam.
- Receive instructions on how to register to retake the exam.

## Feedback on Your Experience

You may receive an email asking you to complete a Post-Exam survey. We encourage you to complete the survey.

## Confidentiality Policy

All test results are released directly to you and will not be released to anyone else. If you are taking the test at an event, please allow four to six weeks for notification of your results. If you are taking the test at a computer based testing center, your results are provided at the completion of the exam.

All candidates who become certified coders may have their names published in a newsletter, website or other public forum.

BMSC has adopted policies and procedures to protect the confidentiality of examination candidates. BMSC staff members will not discuss pending examination applications with anyone but the candidate and will not discuss a candidate's scores by telephone or fax due to identification security issues. BMSC will discuss pending examination applications and score results by

- US mail upon a signed request by the candidate and addressed to the AHCC Director
- OR
- Electronic transmission received from the candidate when the email address is shown in the records of BMSC as being provided by the candidate as their official electronic transmission address

BMSC will not release exam results to educational institutions or employers unless authorized by the candidate in writing.

# 8 Maintaining your Certification

## Purpose

The BMSC recertification (maintenance of certification) program ensures that BMSC certified professionals demonstrate ongoing competence in the domain areas in which they are certified, through either maintenance or enhancement activities. For the purposes of recertification (maintenance of certification), BMSC further defines maintenance and enhancement activities as follows:

**Maintenance:** Completion of educational programs that provide updated training and skills to allow continued competence in home health coding by earning the required number of continuing education units (CEUs) in any of the exam domains.

**Enhancement:** Completion of educational programs that result in expanded knowledge and skills to enhance professional growth in home health coding by earning additional CEUs in a specific Domain. This is beyond the requirement to maintain certification.

BMSC does not allow the grandfathering of credentials in order to earn and/or maintain a credential. All BMSC credential holders must pass their initial certification with a passing score, and maintain their credential through annual recertification requirements. BMSC credential holders who do not perform the respective action by the anniversary of their certification date will have their credential placed in an inactive status. If the recertification requirements have not been met within 90 days of being placed on inactive status, the credential will be revoked.

## Receiving a BMSC Credential Means

- Demonstrating commitment and expertise to the professional area of home health coding, hospice coding, OASIS accuracy, or home health compliance; a dedication to quality healthcare; and a need to establish high standards in managing confidential health information.
- Offering ongoing value to your profession and employer through continuation of your personal education, allowing you to maintain your expertise and contribute at the highest levels.

A BMSC credential signifies experience and knowledge, and validates professional competence for employers, consumers, and yourself.

## What Are the Biggest Benefits of Recertification (Maintenance of Certification)?

- Return on investment from the high value of being BMSC certified
- Professional prestige helps you remain competitive in a tough job market
- Demonstration of your ongoing commitment and competence in home health coding
- Networking opportunities with similarly credentialed peers who share your level of expertise

## To Recertify You Must:

1. Obtain the required number of CEUs during your current recertification cycle.
2. Complete your two mandatory annual self-assessments specific to your certification.
3. Participate in accepted and qualified CEU activities.
4. Report your CEUs on time.
5. Document your CEU activity in your CEU tracker for auditing.
6. Ensure your recertification fee is paid.

## Recertification CEU Requirements

Twenty (20) CEUs, including two (2) mandatory annual coding, OASIS, or compliance self-assessments are required annually. Each mandatory annual coding, OASIS, or compliance self-review is worth five (5) CEUs toward the total CEU requirement.

**Multiple credential holders:** Individuals who hold multiple BMSC credentials will be required to submit evidence of 10 unique CEUs for educational activities and to take the required self-assessments for each individual credential.

For example, if you hold both the HCS-D and the HCS-O, you must earn a total of 40 CEUs each year. You must earn 20 CEUs for educational activities and 20 for the four self-assessments you must take.

## Recertification Cycle

The recertification cycle for a BMSC credential holder begins the day the BMSC credential is awarded and is active for one calendar year. There are 3 important dates to remember as a BMSC credential holder. 1.) Your original certification date, the date you passed your initial exam. 2.) Your anniversary date, which denotes the beginning of your current 12 month cycle, and 3.) Your expiration date, which denotes the end of your current 12 month cycle. It is important that all annual CEUs occur between the anniversary date and the expiration date.

See example below:

Your Certification Date (as listed on your BMSC Certificate)	Recertification Cycle – Year 1	Recertification cycle – Year 2
3-15-19	3-15-19 through 3-15-20	3-15-20 through 3-15-21

In the example above: your original certification date is 3-15-19. your anniversary date is 3-15-20. your expiration date is 3-15-21.

In Year 1, your CEUs must be earned for that 12 month cycle between 3-15-19 (anniversary date) through 3-15-20 (expiration date). The next year, your anniversary date is 3-15-20. Your expiration date is 3-15-21, so all your CEUs for that 12 month reporting cycle must be earned between 3-15-20 (anniversary date) and 3-15-21 (expiration date).

## Qualifying Continuing Education Activities and Calculation of CEU's

### Continuing Education (CE) Content

CEUs must be earned within your current 12 month recertification cycle and must be relevant to the exam domains to be eligible for CE credit. Eighty (80) percent of all CEUs must be earned within the exam domains (see Appendix A). The remaining twenty (20) percent can include participation in CE activities on home health topics not directly relevant to the exam domains.

### Calculation of CEUs

Calculation of CEUs is based upon clock hours. One (1) CEU is given for each 60 minutes of attendance or participation that is fixed in length. Fractional parts of an hour less than 45 minutes in duration will not be considered a full hour credit. Examples are; a program that is 2 ½ hours in length is equivalent to two CEUs. A program that is 2 ¾ hours in length is equivalent to three CEUs.

### CE Activities

1. Participation in educational programs on topics relevant to the exam domains.
  - a. Educational portions of home health meetings (national convention, state, local, or regional



- meetings) — *one (1) CEU for each 60 minutes of participation*
- b. Educational portions of programs of other relevant professional associations—*one (1) CEU for each 60 minutes of participation*
  - c. Educational portions of programs sponsored by organizations or vendors on topics that maintain, update, or enlarge knowledge and skills relevant to the pertinent home health or hospice profession—*one (1) CEU for each 60 minutes of participation*
  - d. Telecommunications and webinars relevant to the pertinent home health or hospice profession—*one (1) CEU for each 60 minutes of participation*
2. Publication and presentation of material relevant to the pertinent home health or hospice profession.
    - a. Publication is the development of an original work relevant to the pertinent home health or hospice profession, reproduced by written or electronic means for general dissemination to the public (unless required as part of work responsibilities; see non-qualifying section).
      - Author of a textbook, workbook, or manual—twenty (20) CEUs
      - Editor of a textbook, workbook, or manual—ten (10) CEUs
      - Author of an article in a home health or hospice professional journal—five (5) CEUs
      - Author of a chapter in a textbook, workbook, or manual—ten (10) CEUs
      - Editor of a home health or hospice professional journal—five (5) CEUs
      - BMSC course writing (for example, coding on-line library course)—ten (10) CEUs
      - Author of an educational article in a local or state newsletter—two (2) CEUs
      - Reviewer of book manuscripts prior to publications—one (1) CEU per chapter
      - Author of an original tool for the AHCC Tools library— one (1) CEU
      - Author of a post for the AHCC blog—one (1) CEU
      - Author of an article for AHCC Quarterly Journal—two (2) CEUs
    - b. Presentation is the development of an original work delivered to an audience.
      - Speaker at an educational program—one (1) CEU for each 60 minutes of podium time, with a maximum of five (5) CEUs allowed per educational program
      - Panel participant at an educational program—one (1) CEU for each 60 minutes of podium time, with a maximum of five (5) CEUs allowed per educational program
  3. Independent study activities relevant to the home health coding profession.
    - a. Enrollment in one or more BMSC study program modules (*CEUs pre-determined by BMSC*)
    - b. Enrollment in home study programs relevant to the exam domains' core education content areas from organizations other than BMSC (*BMSC prior approval required*)
    - c. BMSC post-test offerings accompanying an *Association of Home Care Coding and Compliance (AHCC) Ezine* article or book published by DecisionHealth (*CEUs pre-determined by BMSC*)
    - d. Advanced research (for example, reading and analyzing material above and beyond one's knowledge of the subject matter) in a home health coding topic area to support activities associated with an expert panel, workgroup, or task force of BMSC or its affiliate—*one (1) CEU per each year*
    - e. Post-test offerings accompanying quarterly issues of *AHCC Journal*.
    - f. Post-survey following an AHCC Premium Quarterly Town Hall Call.

4. Item writing
  - Item writing for BMSC’s certification exams (CEUs pre-determined by BMSC)
5. Other activities
  - Substantive oversight and involvement —five (5) CEUs with a maximum of ten (10) CEUs allowed in each recertification cycle
  - Substantive oversight and involvement includes, but is not limited to:
    - Creating an ICD-10-CM training plan and schedule of activities
    - Visiting BMSC/AHCC exhibits at a national or state meeting—one (1) CEU per meeting
    - Participation in a BMSC or AHCC volunteer leader conference or work group (CEUs pre-determined by BMSC)
    - Internet educational offerings relevant to BMSC core education content areas (BMSC prior-approval required)
    - Activities defined by the guidelines for approval of CE programs for national, state, local, and regional home health associations
    - Exceptional events recognized by BMSC

### **Non-Qualifying Continuing Education Activities**

Examples of activities that do not qualify for CEUs are as follows. The list is illustrative and not intended to be all-inclusive.

- Responsibilities that fall within the normal parameters of an individual’s job description, including, but not limited to, the following: (1) staff meetings; (2) in-services; (3) preparation for and/or participation in accreditation and licensure surveys; (4) preparation of procedure, policy, or administrative manuals; (5) training home health coders; (6) participation in career day activities; (7) development of employee and staff training materials
- Published materials and/or presentations developed as a direct part of an individual’s employment
- Instructing or teaching a class within the normal parameters of an individual’s job description

### **Reporting your CEUs**

To recertify, you will report your CEUs in your CEU tracker and pay the recertification fee online at the AHCC website.

### **When to Report**

You should report your CEUs in your CEU tracker and complete the online recertification process no later than your current expiration date which is located above your tracker.

You must report your CEUs and complete the recertification process no later than three (3) months into the following recertification period. Your certification will be placed on inactive status during the 90 day grace period and you will not be able to promote yourself as a credential holder in good standing during the 90 day late period.

Your certification will be revoked after the 90 day grace period if you have not recertified.

### **Fees (plus any applicable late fees):**

- Initial Registration Fee for Certifying Exam – \$329.00
- Annual recertification CEU requirements and maintenance fee - \$229.00

**\*A 15% late fee will be assessed, in addition to the recertification fee, if renewal is not received by expiration date, but is within the 90 day grace period.**

*Note: The initial certifying exam fee and the recertification annual maintenance fee includes a one-year complimentary basic membership enrollment in the Association of Home Care Coding and Compliance.*

## Certification Status

### Status Types

- a. Active: Credential holder meets all recertification requirements, including recertification fee, within current certification cycle
- b. Inactive: Failure to complete all recertification requirements, including the recertification fee, within the current certification cycle but is within the 90 day (late) grace period

*\*BMSC provides a three (3) month window for credential holders who have been placed on inactive status to meet recertification requirements and report CEUs. Therefore, any credential holder who has not met recertification requirements by 90 days past the expiration of their certification date will have their credential revoked. The credential may not be used during the period of inactive status. The recertification fee plus a 15% late fee must be paid to re-activate a credential to active status.*

- c. Revoked:
  - I. Failure to complete and report all recertification requirements, including the recertification fee, within the current certification cycle and is 91 days or greater past expiration date.
  - II. BMSC Appeals or AHCC Professional Ethics decision regarding misconduct.

*\*Credential holders who do not report their CEUs will have their credential revoked. Individuals may not use the applicable credential once it has been revoked.*

## Reinstatement of Credentials

BMSC provides one way to reinstate a revoked credential:

### Reactivate by Exam

- a. Retake the applicable certification exam

After an inactive certification has lapsed beyond the 90 day grace period and has been revoked, the only way to be reinstated and returned to active status is to retake the applicable certification exam.

# 9 Additional Recertification Processes

## Audits

Each year a percentage of recertified credential holders are randomly selected for audit. Individuals selected for audits will be notified by email and required to submit verifiable documentation (for example, certificates of attendance or similar materials) for each activity listed on their CEU tracker by the due date specified on the audit notification email.

Verifiable documentation can include certificates of attendance, program materials, or other information provided by the program sponsor that verify program date, length, and subject matter (that is, CEU certificate, agenda, program outline, handout, meeting summary, or meeting transcript).

It is therefore recommended that CEU participants retain all records in their files for at least one year following the cycle end date. Individuals who fail to respond to the audit request by the specified due date or are found to have submitted false information on their recertification form may be denied recertification.

## Waiver of CE Requirements

BMSC may for good cause waive or reduce the CEU requirement. Certificants may request a temporary or permanent waiver by submitting a written request to BMSC for consideration prior to revocation.

- a. **Temporary Waiver**—Temporarily waive recertification requirements due to extenuating circumstances or hardships (for example, financial hardship, illness, unforeseen circumstances, and natural catastrophes)
- b. **Permanent Waiver**—Permanently waive recertification requirements as a result of full-time retirement.

## Extensions

You may be granted a recertification extension, but only under the following special circumstances:

- **Natural disaster:** In the event of bad weather, a natural disaster, or another emergency (for example, a test center power outage)
- **Medical or Personal Emergency:** A medical or personal emergency is an unplanned event that prevents you from taking the exam. A medical or personal emergency may apply to you or one of your immediate family members; spouse, child, or parent as defined by the Family Medical Leave Act. Documentation (such as a doctor's note, emergency room forms, obituary) showing why you could not take your exam will be required.

If the candidate has met one of the above special circumstances, requests an extension for an exam or certification eligibility period, and is approved the extension, the fees that apply are:

1. First Approved Request for an Extension: \$75 (valid for 45 days)
2. Second and Final Approved Request for an Extension: \$150 (valid for an additional 30 days). No additional extension will be authorized.

**Appeals**

Individuals whose credential has been revoked or whose application for reinstatement has been denied may appeal to BMSC by completing the Consideration Form located on the AHCC website.

**Recertification Policy Rationale**

BMSC credentials require annual recertification because the ICD-10-CM code set, official coding guidelines, OASIS guidance, and regulations are updated annually. Because the major reference tools for home health professionals are subject to change every year, competency should be evaluated every year in accordance with the dynamic nature of the official guidance.

## 10

## Code of Conduct

### Introduction

The Board of Medical Specialty Coding & Compliance's (BMSC) Ethical Standards and Code of Conduct (Ethics Code) consists of a statement of underlying principles and specific Ethical Standards.

The General Principles are goals that we aspire to and are guides to Home Health and Hospice Professionals striving for the highest ideals in their profession. The General Principles are not themselves rules, they should be considered in arriving at an ethical course of action. They are also statements of your obligation to maintain the very highest standards of competence, morality and dignity.

The Ethical Standards establish more detailed guidelines for conduct. Most of the Ethical Standards are written broadly, in order to apply to varied roles. The Ethical Standards are not exhaustive. The fact that an Ethical Standard does not specifically address a given conduct does not mean that the conduct is necessarily either ethical or unethical.

Members of the profession are responsible for maintaining and promoting ethical standards and practices within their profession and in their interactions with other healthcare professionals. BMSC-certified professionals are expected to uphold these standards, the objectives of BMSC. Actions that violate the standards of the Ethics Code may lead to revocation of the certification. In addition, when notified of a violation, BMSC reserves the right to notify an employer or appropriate governmental agency.

This Ethics Code applies only to home health or hospice professionals' activities that are part of their educational or professional roles. Areas covered include, but are not limited to, the practice of coding; teaching; supervision of trainees; public service; policy development; organizational consulting; testimony; program design and evaluation; and administration. This Ethics Code applies to these activities across a variety of contexts, such as in person, postal, telephone, internet, and other electronic transmissions. These activities shall be distinguished from the purely private conduct of coders, which is not outlined in the Ethics Code.

The modifiers used in some of the standards of this Ethics Code (such as reasonably, appropriate, potentially) are included in the standards when they would (1) allow professional judgment on the part of home health or hospice professionals, (2) eliminate injustice or inequality that would occur without the modifier, (3) ensure applicability across the broad range of activities conducted by these professionals, or (4) guard against a set of rigid rules that might be quickly outdated. As used in this Ethics Code, the term reasonable means the prevailing professional judgment of professionals engaged in similar activities in similar circumstances, given the knowledge the professional had or should have had at the time.

In the process of making decisions regarding their professional behavior, home health and hospice professionals must consider this Ethics Code in addition to applicable laws. In applying the Ethics Code to their professional work, home health and hospice professionals may consider other materials and guidelines that have been adopted or endorsed by professional organizations and the dictates of their own conscience, as well as consult with others within the field. If this Ethics Code establishes a higher standard of conduct than is required by law, home health and hospice professionals should meet the higher ethical standard.

Home health and hospice professionals are committed to increasing accurate documentation, correct coding, and proper billing. They are committed to the growth of professional knowledge and to the use of such knowledge to improve the legal and financial situation of medical practitioners or employers. They are committed to the use of professional knowledge to implement an effective compliance program and improve the regulatory situation of medical practitioners or employers. This Ethics Code provides a common set of principles and standards upon which home health and hospice

professionals build their professional work.

This Ethics Code is intended to provide specific standards to cover most situations encountered by home health and hospice professionals. The development of a set of ethical standards for work-related conduct requires a personal commitment and lifelong effort to act ethically; to encourage ethical behavior by employers, employees, and colleagues; and to consult with others concerning ethical problems.

## **General Principles**

General Principles, as opposed to Ethical Standards, are an aspiration, something we strive toward. Their intent is to guide and inspire coders toward the very highest ethical ideals of the profession. General Principles represent the underlying thoughts and ideals of our Ethical Standards.

### **Principle A: Attitude**

Home health and hospice professionals strive to benefit those with whom they work and take care to do no harm. In their professional actions, home health and hospice professionals seek to safeguard the welfare and rights of those with whom they work and other affected persons and entities. When conflicts occur between obligations or concerns, they attempt to resolve these conflicts in a responsible fashion. Because a professional judgments and actions may affect the lives of others, home health and hospice professionals are alert to and guard against personal, financial, social, organizational, or political factors that might lead to misuse of their influence.

### **Principle B: Duty**

Home health and hospice professionals establish relationships of trust with those with whom they work. They are aware of their professional responsibilities to society and to the specific situations in which they work. Home health and hospice professionals uphold professional conduct, clarify their professional obligations, accept appropriate responsibility for their behavior, and seek to manage conflicts of interest that could lead to exploitation or harm. Home health and hospice professionals consult with, refer to, or cooperate with other professionals to the extent needed to serve the best interests of those with whom they work. They are concerned about the ethical compliance of their employers and colleagues' professional conduct.

### **Principle C: Integrity**

Home health and hospice professionals seek to promote accuracy, honesty, and truthfulness in their profession. In these activities home health and hospice professionals do not steal, cheat, or knowingly engage in fraud, subterfuge, or intentional misrepresentation of fact. Home health and hospice professionals strive to maintain their integrity and to avoid unwise or unclear commitments.

### **Principle D: Respect**

Home health and hospice professionals respect the dignity and worth of all people, and the rights of individuals to privacy and confidentiality. Home health and hospice professionals are aware that special safeguards may be necessary to protect the rights and welfare of patients, clients and employers. Home health and hospice professionals are aware of and respect cultural, individual differences including those based on age, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, language, and socioeconomic status and consider these factors when working with members of such groups.

## 11

## Ethical Standards

### Resolving Ethical Issues

- **Misuse of Work**  
If home health and hospice professionals learn of misuse or misrepresentation of their work, they take reasonable steps to correct or minimize the misuse.
- **Conflicts Between Ethics and Law**  
If a home health and hospice professional's ethical responsibilities conflict with law, regulations, or payor policy, home health and hospice professionals will take steps to resolve the conflict. If the conflict is not solved, home health and hospice professionals will abide by the law, regulations, or other legal authority.
- **Conflicts Between Ethics and Organizational Demands**  
If the requirements of an organization for which they are working conflict with this Ethics Code, home health and hospice professionals will make every attempt to resolve the conflict and still follow the Ethics Code.

### Competence

- **Boundaries of Competence**  
Home health and hospice professionals will provide services and teach only within the scope of their competence, based on their education, training, study, or professional experience.
- **Lifelong learning**  
Home health and hospice professionals will work to develop and maintain their competence.

### Human Relations

- **Discrimination**  
In their work-related activities, home health and hospice professionals do not engage in unfair discrimination based on age, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic status, or any basis proscribed by law.
- **Sexual Harassment**  
Home health and hospice professionals do not engage in sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is sexual solicitation, physical advances, or verbal or nonverbal conduct that is sexual in nature, that occurs in connection with the home health and hospice professional's activities and that either (1) is unwelcome, is offensive, or creates a hostile workplace or educational environment, or (2) is sufficiently severe or intense to be abusive to a reasonable person in the context. Sexual harassment can consist of a single intense or severe act or of multiple persistent or pervasive acts.
- **Other Harassment**  
Home health and hospice professionals do not knowingly engage in behavior that is harassing or demeaning to others due to factors such as those persons' age, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, language, or socioeconomic status.
- **Avoiding Harm**  
Home health and hospice professionals take reasonable steps to avoid harming their clients or employers or others with whom they work.



- **Conflict of Interest**

Home health and hospice professionals will not take on a professional role when personal, professional, legal, financial, or other interests that could reasonably be expected to (1) impair their objectivity, competence, or effectiveness or (2) expose the organization to harm or exploitation.

Home health and hospice professionals will not accept any gift, gratuity, payment or other inducement from anyone that would call into question the objectivity and/or validity of their work product.

## **Privacy and Confidentiality**

- **Maintaining Confidentiality**

Home health and hospice professionals have a primary obligation and take reasonable precautions to protect confidential information within the limits of law or established by institutional rules.

- **Minimizing Intrusions on Privacy**

Home health and hospice professionals discuss confidential information obtained in their work only for appropriate professional purposes and only with persons clearly concerned with such matters.

- **Disclosures**

Home health and hospice professionals may disclose confidential information with the appropriate consent of the individual client/patient, or another legally authorized person on behalf of the client/patient unless prohibited by law. Home health and hospice professionals disclose confidential information without the consent of the individual only as mandated by law, or where permitted by law for a valid purpose.

## **Advertising and Other Public Statements**

- **Avoidance of False or Deceptive Statements**

Public statements include but are not limited to paid or unpaid advertising, certification applications, other credentialing applications, brochures, printed matter, directory listings, personal resumes or public comments such as print or electronic transmission, statements in legal proceedings, lectures and public oral presentations, and published materials. Home health and hospice professionals do not make false, deceptive, or fraudulent statements concerning their training, experience, or competence; their credentials; or their institutional or association affiliations.

- **Media Presentations**

When home health and hospice professionals provide public advice or comment verbally, in print, by the internet, or other electronic transmission, they take precautions to ensure that statements are based on their professional knowledge, training, or experience, are in accord with law or policy, and are ethical.

## **Record Keeping and Fees**

- **Fees and Financial Arrangements**

A home health or hospice professional shall make sure all their charges are clearly stated in an agreement specifying compensation and billing arrangements. All fee practices will be consistent with law and will not misrepresent costs or charges.

- **Accuracy in Reports to Payors and Funding Sources**

In their reports to payors for services and in coding and billing activities, coders shall take reasonable steps to ensure accurate reporting.

### **Education and Training**

- **Accuracy in Teaching**

Home health and hospice professionals take reasonable steps to ensure that course materials are accurate regarding the subject matter to be covered, basis for evaluating progress, and the nature of course experiences. When teaching or training, home health and hospice professionals will present all information accurately, without bias and based upon reputable sources.

- **Student Disclosure**

Home health and hospice professionals will take every possible step to ensure the privacy of any grades or other student information and will establish a timely and specific process for providing feedback to students.

- **Standard Tests**

Should Home health and hospice professionals have access to any standard tests or certification exams, they will keep such information confidential and not release confidential information concerning the tests, the answers or any information concerning the scoring or development of the test or exam. Discussion of items pertaining to and included in the BMSC tests is permitted for the sole purpose of test development as directed by BMSC.

## 12

## Privacy Policy Statement

DecisionHealth the sole owner of BMSC is committed to protecting your privacy and holds our relationship with users in the highest regard. This policy describes the ways that personally identifiable and anonymous information about our credential holders, online users, event registrants and print subscribers is gathered, our information sharing practices, and how credential holders, online users and print subscribers may request changes to the way this information is shared.

### Personally Identifiable Information We Collect and Use

#### Information Collection

DecisionHealth® is the sole owner of the information collected on the AHCC website. DecisionHealth® collects information from our users at several different points on our website.

#### Registration

During registration a user may be required to give contact information (such as name and email address). We use this information to contact the user about services on our site for which he/she has expressed interest. Some information is optional while other information may be required. In some cases a unique identifier (such as, username and password) may be required in order to obtain further benefits from our website.

#### Information Use

Our primary goal in collecting personal information is to provide you with the best and most useful content and services. In addition, we may use the information collected from you to contact you from time to time regarding our products and/or services. At all times you have the right to request that we cease contacting you by 'opting out' of our communications.

#### Cookies

Like other websites, DecisionHealth sites use cookies to improve your experience with our online content. For instance, we may use a cookie to identify members so they don't have to re-enter their email address and password when they come to our sites. We use both session ID cookies and persistent cookies which enable us to track and target the interests of our users to improve the content on our site. Usage of cookies tells us nothing about who you are and is no way linked to any personally identifiable information. By adjusting your settings on your browser, you may elect not to allow cookies to be collected. However, it is likely that some areas of the site will not function properly if you do so.

#### Log Files

Like most standard website servers we use log files. This includes internet protocol (IP) addresses, browser type, internet service provider (ISP), referring/exit pages, platform type, date/time stamp, and number of clicks to analyze trends, administer the site, track user's movement in the aggregate, and gather broad demographic information for aggregate use. IP addresses, etc. are not linked to personally identifiable information.

#### Third Party Advertising

Some of our advertisers use third-party companies to serve their advertisements on our sites and, in some cases, in our HTML-formatted newsletters. Often, these third-party advertising companies employ cookie and pixel tag technologies to measure the effectiveness of web and email advertisements. We do not give any personally identifiable information to them as part of this relationship. Use of their tracking technology is subject to their own privacy policies.

### Legal Disclaimer

Though we make every effort to preserve user privacy, we may need to disclose personal information when required by law wherein we have a good-faith belief that such action is necessary to comply with a current judicial proceeding, a court order or legal process served on our website.

### Aggregate Information (non-personally identifiable)

We may share aggregated demographic information with our partners, third parties for marketing, promotional, and other purposes. This is not linked to any personally identifiable information.

### Links

Our websites may contain links to other sites. Please be aware that DecisionHealth is not responsible for the privacy practices of such other sites. We encourage our users to be aware when they leave our site and to read the privacy statements of each and every website that collects personally identifiable information. This privacy statement applies solely to information collected by this website.

### Surveys & Contests

We may provide you the opportunity to participate in contests or surveys on our site. Participation in these surveys or contests is completely voluntary and the user therefore has a choice whether or not to disclose this information. The requested information typically includes contact information (such as name and email address). Contact information will be used to notify the winners and award prizes. Anonymous Survey information will be used for purposes of monitoring or improving the use and satisfaction of this site. Users' personally identifiable information is not shared with third parties unless we give prior notice and choice. Though we may use an intermediary to conduct these surveys or contests, they may not use users' personally identifiable information for any secondary purposes.

### Changing Your Privacy Options

To update your registration information, update your newsletter subscriptions or opt-out, contact customer service at 1-855-225-5341 or [customer@decisionhealth.com](mailto:customer@decisionhealth.com)

### Notification of Changes

This Privacy Policy may be modified from time to time. If there is a material change in our privacy practices, we will post those changes to this privacy statement. If there is a significant change, we will indicate on our sites that our privacy practices have changed and provide a link to the new privacy statement.

### Questions

If users have any questions or suggestions regarding our privacy policy, you can contact us at:

DecisionHealth  
100 Winners Circle, Suite 300  
Brentwood, TN 37027

Phone: 1-855-CALL-DH1

## 13

## Proprietary Rights

All proprietary rights in the examinations, including copyrights and trade secrets, are held by BMSC. In order to protect the integrity of the examinations and to ensure the validity of the scores reported, candidates must adhere to strict guidelines regarding proper conduct in handling copyrighted proprietary examinations. Any attempt to reproduce all or part of the examinations, including, but not limited to, removing materials from the examination room, aiding others by any means in reconstructing any portion of the examinations, selling, distributing, receiving or having unauthorized possession of any portion of the examinations, is strictly prohibited by law. Alleged copyright violations will be investigated and, if warranted, prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. It should be noted that all examination scores may be invalidated in the event of this type of suspected breach. Candidates may not write on any examination materials distributed by or belonging to BMSC unless authorized by the proctor/test administrator.

A candidate can be disqualified from taking or continuing to sit for an examination, or from receiving examination results, or the candidate's scores might be cancelled, if BMSC determines through proctor observation, statistical analysis, and other evidence that the candidate's score may not be valid or that the candidate was engaged in collaborative, disruptive, or other unacceptable behavior during the administration of the examination.

Examination (pass/fail) results are confidential and will not be disclosed to anyone without candidate's written consent, unless directed by valid and lawful subpoena or court order. If you would like your examination results to be released to a third party, you must provide BMSC with a written request that specially identifies the types of details (e.g., examination date, pass/fail status, etc.) about the examination results that the third-party should receive.

The BMSC exam content does not require scoring by judges. BMSC exam content utilizes a multiple-choice format, with only one correct response for each item. All candidates must pass the initial certification exam to be awarded a BMSC credential. No BMSC credential holder is granted certification without having to meet the examination requirement established for certification.

## 14

## Special Accommodations for BMSC Examination Candidates under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

BMSC will comply with the ADA and will provide reasonable accommodations for individuals with disabilities that substantially limit one or more major life activities. “An individual with a disability” is one who:

- Has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits that person in one or more major life activities; OR
- Has a record of such a physical or mental impairment; OR
- Is regarded as having such a physical or mental impairment.

“Major life activities” are activities that an average person can perform with little or no difficulty (for example walking, talking, hearing, seeing, and performing manual tasks).

“A qualified individual with a disability” is one who:

- With a disability, satisfies the requisite skill, experience, education, and other requirements of the service, program, or activity, OR
- With or without reasonable accommodation, can perform the essential functions of the service, program, or activity.

NOTE: To be protected under the ADA, a person must be a “qualified individual with a disability.”

### Candidate Responsibilities

1. Candidates must meet the stated eligibility requirements for the examination for which the candidate has applied.
2. Candidates requesting accommodations under the ADA must complete and submit the form labeled “Request for Accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)” located on the AHCC website.
3. Candidates must provide or arrange to provide documentation verifying the disability and supporting the request for accommodations.
4. Supporting documentation verifying the disability and the candidate’s need for specific accommodations must be completed by a licensed professional or certified specialist appropriate for the disability and must include:
  - a. A formal diagnosis using professionally recognized diagnostic criteria
  - b. A discussion of necessary accommodations and previously recommended or provided accommodation
  - c. A statement of how the disability affects the candidate’s “major life activities”
5. Documentation must reflect that the candidate has been evaluated by the licensed professional or certified specialist within the past three years. If a candidate has a long-standing disability that is not likely to improve, documentation older than three years may be acceptable if provided with an update obtained within the past three years.
6. Reasonable accommodations that may be provided for BMSC’s examinations include:
  - a. An accessible testing site
  - b. A separate testing room
  - c. Extended testing time
  - d. A screen magnifier
  - e. A reader

7. The application for accommodations and supporting documentation will be reviewed and the candidate will be notified, in writing, of the accommodations approved for that candidate. The accommodations provided will be appropriate for the documented disability but may not be the exact accommodations that have been requested.
8. Accommodations requested by a third party (for example, a teacher or family member) will not be honored.
9. Accommodations that are not required by the ADA and will not be provided include those that:
  - a. Alter the knowledge and skills measured by the examination and may affect the validity of the examination
  - b. Provide an unfair advantage for the disabled candidate
  - c. Compromise examination security
  - d. Are requested for candidates who speak English as a second language
  - e. Address temporary physical conditions
  - f. Provide personal services and devices (for example, wheelchairs, hearing aids)
  - g. Pose an undue financial or administrative burden on BMSC or the proctor /location providing test administration

## 15

**Credential Verification**

Certification status may be verified by employers, government agencies, and accrediting agencies by accessing the Directory of Certified Credential Holders on the AHCC website.

BMSC demonstrates transparency and disclosure to the public by maintaining a public Directory of Certified Credential Holders on the AHCC website. This directory lists only those credential holders who have an active credential status and does not disclose any confidential information such as, date the candidate became certified, number of certification attempts, contact information or any other personal candidate data.



## 16

## BMSC Appeals Policy and Procedure

Because the performance of each question on the examination that is included in the final score has been pretested, there are no appeal procedures to challenge individual examination questions, answers, or a failing score. The Certification Programs will always apply the same passing score (“cut score”) and the same answer key to all candidates taking the same form of the exam. Appeals may be made on the following grounds:

- Candidate eligibility
- Revocation of credential
- Inappropriate examination administration procedures or environmental testing conditions severe enough to cause a major disruption of the examination process

All appeals must be submitted in writing to:

BMSC Certification Program  
100 Winners Circle Suite 300  
Brentwood, TN 37027

Or email: [customer@decisionhealth.com](mailto:customer@decisionhealth.com)

The candidate must explain in detail the nature of the request and the specific facts and circumstances supporting the request, including reasons why the action or decision should be changed or modified. The candidate must also provide accurate copies of all supporting documents.

Eligibility and revocation appeals must be received within thirty (30) days of the initial action. Appeals for alleged inappropriate administration procedures or severe adverse environmental testing conditions must be received within sixty (60) days of the release of examination results.

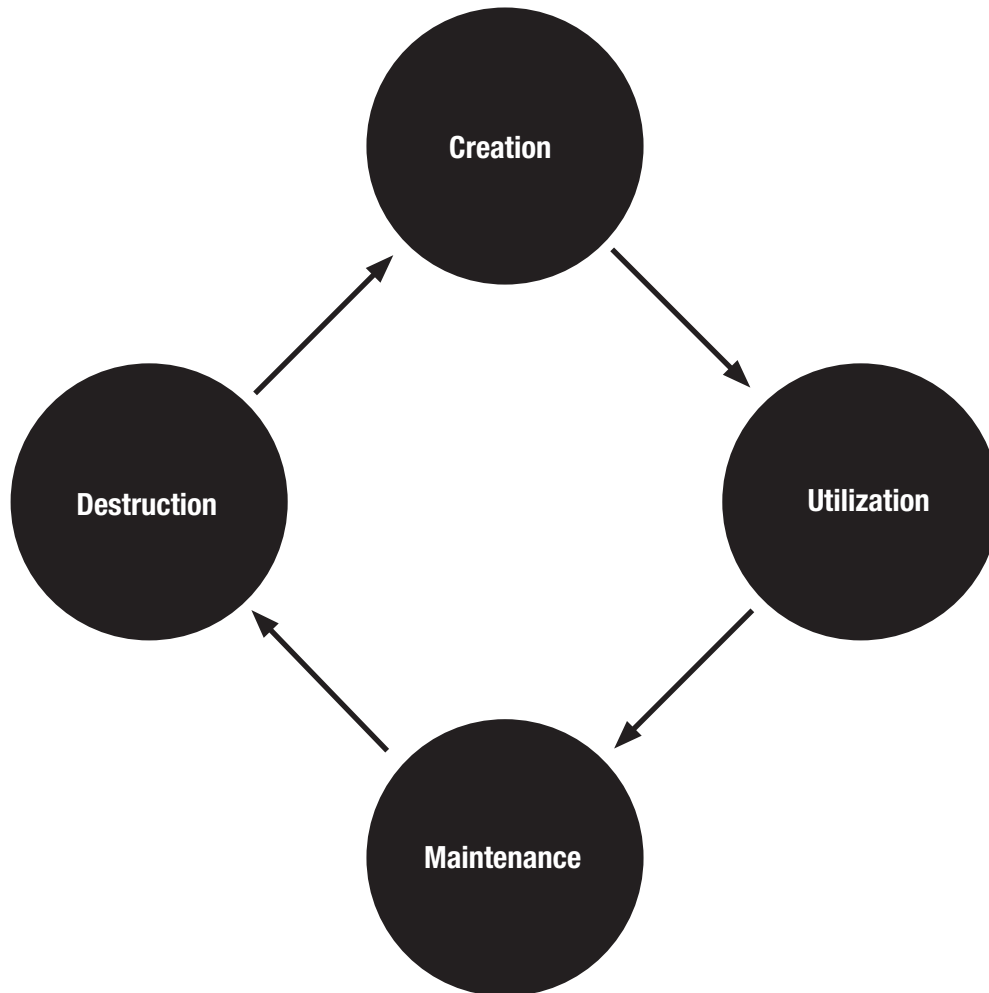
AHCC will respond within thirty (30) days of receipt of the appeal. If this decision is adverse, the candidate may file a second-level appeal within thirty (30) days.

A three-member panel of the appropriate Certification Committee will review the initial decision and respond with a final decision within forty-five (45) days of receipt.

## 17

## Record Retention Policy

The life cycle of records management begins when the information is created and ends when the information is destroyed. The picture below provides a simple reflection of the entire records retention process. The goal for BMSC is to manage each step in the record life cycle to ensure record availability.



### BMSC retention schedule:

- Ensures examination records are available to meet the needs of the credential candidates / holders, legal requirements, research, education, and other legitimate uses of the organization
- Includes guidelines that specify what information is kept, the time period for which it is kept, and the storage medium on which it will be maintained.
- Includes clear destruction policies and procedures that include appropriate methods of destruction for each medium on which information is maintained

There is no single standardized record retention schedule that organizations and providers must follow. Instead, a variety of retention requirements were reviewed by BMSC to create a compliant retention program including but not limited to the Federal Register and numerous acts such as the Higher Education Act of 1965 disclosure requirements. When reviewing and comparing the varying retention schedules BMSC elected to follow the more restrictive requirement.

**Active Records:**

Active records are consulted or used on a routine basis. Routine functions may include activities such as release of information request, quality reviews and appeals process. Active records are maintained in an electronic database, backed up nightly on secure servers and additionally with off-site reserve secure servers.

**Inactive Records:**

Inactive records are used rarely but must be retained for reference or to meet the full retention requirements. Inactive records usually involve a credential candidate/holder who has not sought information for a period of time or one who has successfully recertified the initial certification examination. Inactive records are maintained in an electronic database, backed up nightly on secure servers and additionally with off-site reserve secure servers.

**Destruction:**

Destruction of examination records by BMSC is carried out in accordance with a proper written retention schedule and destruction policy approved by the BMSC Board. Examinations involved in any open investigation, audit, or litigation will not be destroyed until the litigation case has been closed. There is no single standard destruction requirement. BMSC elected to follow the more restrictive destruction requirement.

**Destruction method:**

- Paper records are shredded

**Retention policy:**

- All electronic examination tests and results, including score report will be retained permanently.
- All paper examination test booklets and examination answer sheets will be destroyed after two years.

*\*All paper examination answer sheets are scanned into an electronic database upon arrival to the certification office and the electronic version will be kept permanently, including score report.*

**Example:**

Record Type	Record Retention
Electronic record	Permanently
Paper record (after being scanned into electronic database)	Two (2) years

**Example:**

Paper exam taken at live event	Paper exam arrives at BMSC office	Paper exam results scanned into electronic database	Paper exam record retention cycle begins	Paper exam destroyed	Electronic version of paper exam record retention
2-12-12	2-15-12	2-16-12	2-17-12	2-17-14	Permanent

## 18

## Security

### General Security Policy

All proprietary rights in the examinations, including copyrights and trade secrets, are held by BMSC. In order to protect the integrity of the examinations and to ensure the validity of the scores reported, candidates must adhere to strict guidelines regarding proper conduct in handling copyrighted proprietary examinations. Any attempt to reproduce all or part of the examinations, including, but not limited to, removing materials from the examination room, aiding others by any means in reconstructing any portion of the examinations, selling, distributing, receiving or having unauthorized possession of any portion of the examinations, is strictly prohibited by law. Alleged copyright violations will be investigated and, if warranted, prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. It should be noted that all examination scores may be invalidated in the event of this type of suspected breach. Candidates may not write on any examination materials distributed by or belonging to BMSC unless authorized by the proctor / test administrator.

A candidate can be disqualified from taking or continuing to sit for an examination, or from receiving examination results, or the candidate's scores might be cancelled, if BMSC determines through proctor observation, statistical analysis, and other evidence that the candidate's score may not be valid or that the candidate was engaged in collaborative, disruptive, or other unacceptable behavior during the administration of the examination. Examination (pass/fail) results are confidential and will not be disclosed to anyone without candidate's written consent, unless directed by valid and lawful subpoena or court order. If you would like your examination results to be released to a third party, you must provide BMSC with a written request that specially identifies the types of details (e.g., examination date, pass/fail status, etc.) about the examination results that the third-party should receive. All items and forms are maintained at the offices of the Board of Medical Specialty Coding & Compliance. Access is restricted during business hours to staff (via a key card) and authorized visitors (visitors pass). Doors are locked at all times. The building security is monitored after hours by an electronic security system and by a security company. All secure testing material is maintained within the office suite in secured cabinets. Item banks and other secure materials maintained by BMSC are password protected.

### Exam Shipping Policy from BMSC to Live Event

1. Box of exam-related items is requested by BMSC Certification Coordinator to the shipping department.
2. Shipping department seals box of exam contents, and addresses label to assigned proctor (for the specified conference).
3. Shipping department sends box by UPS for delivery to the proctor. Shipping department sends the UPS tracking information to the BMSC Certification Coordinator.
4. BMSC Certification Coordinator sends tracking number via email to approved proctor (for the specified conference), so they both can track shipment and delivery of the package.
5. Proctor keeps exam materials with him/her at all times, until examination is administered. If exams are sent in advance of a particular event (where the exam is being administered), examinations are kept in a locked safe with only the proctor having the combination to access the exams.

## 19

## Frequently Asked Questions

**How can I find out if there is a PSI testing location in my area?**

1. Visit <https://candidate.psiexams.com/>.
2. On the left side of the page, click on “[Certification/Professional Associations](#),” then select the sponsor name: **Board of Medical Specialty Coding & Compliance (BMSC)**. This displays a list of certification exams (including HCS-C, HCS-D, HCS-H, and HCS-O).
3. Choose the exam you’d like to sit for from the list.
4. On the next page click on “[Test Centers](#)” on the right-hand side of the page. This will display a list of test centers in your area that offer the exam. You can search the list by country and state.

**How can I find out if a PSI testing center near me has availability on a certain date?**

1. Visit <https://candidate.psiexams.com/>.
2. Scroll to the bottom of the home page. Under “**Check Available Appointment Dates Before You Register**,” click on “[Click here](#).”
3. Select the organization “[Certification/Professional Associations](#),” then select a sponsor name: **Board of Medical Specialty Coding & Compliance (BMSC)**. This displays a list of certification exams (including HCS-C, HCS-D, HCS-H, and HCS-O).
4. Choose the exam you’d like to sit for and click continue.
5. On the next page, enter your zip code or city to find a testing center near you. Once you click on a testing center location, all current availabilities will display. **Note:** You must call to confirm as the appointments fill up quickly.

**How should I prepare for the exam? How much coding experience is suggested before taking the exam?**

The most successful credential candidates have on-the-job experience, have attended coding or OASIS training events, and have followed a course of self-study. See the [Candidate Handbook](#) for more detail about the eligibility and qualifications we recommend for each BMSC exam.

We also recommend the following study guides to help you prepare for your respective exam(s):

- **HCS-D:** <https://store.decisionhealth.com/hcs-d-certification-study-guide-2021>
- **HCS-O:** <https://store.decisionhealth.com/oasis-hcs-o-certification-guide-2021>
- **HCS-H:** <https://store.decisionhealth.com/hcs-h-certification-guide-2021>
- **HCS-C:** <https://store.decisionhealth.com/hcs-c-certification-study-2021>

**If I purchase the study guide and other DecisionHealth study materials, take the BMSC Associate program online courses, and have some background in coding and/or OASIS, will I pass the certification exam?**

All study materials are optional. A self-study program is encouraged; however it does not guarantee a candidate will pass the exam. See the [Candidate Handbook](#) for more details on the eligibility and qualifications required to take each of the BMSC exams.

**Is there some type of resource I can print out that walks me through the credentialing process?**

Yes, the [candidate handbook](#) contains all the information you will need to understand and prepare for a BMSC credential.

**How do I register for an exam?**

Complete the online registration in the DecisionHealth store at <https://store.decisionhealth.com/bmsc>. Once you have registered for an exam, you will receive an email confirmation. Please allow up

to three (3) business days after receipt of this email before scheduling your exam with our testing partner, PSI. PSI will send you an email with instructions on how to schedule your exam.

**How do I submit a request for special accommodations at a PSI testing center?**

Complete the ADA Accommodation form found on the AHCC website at <https://ahcc.decisionhealth.com/media/1039/ada-request-for-accommodation.pdf>. BMSC will review the ADA form and supporting documentation, and if the accommodations are approved, we will contact our testing partner PSI. PSI will contact you in three (3) business days, after we have approved the accommodations, to schedule you for the exam. The exam **cannot** be scheduled online with PSI. There may be additional fees that apply with some accommodations.

**Can I take my exam at an international PSI testing center, outside of the United States? How do I schedule this?**

Yes, you can take an exam at an international PSI testing center, if the BMSC exam is available at that location. Contact customer service for more information at 1-855-CALL-DH1 or [customer@decisionhealth.com](mailto:customer@decisionhealth.com). There is an additional international seat fee that applies in addition to the exam fee. Once the location for the testing center is confirmed and the payment for the exam registration and international seat fee has been processed, BMSC will contact PSI to schedule the exam at the international PSI testing center.

**Note:** It takes up to 4 weeks after registration to have the exam scheduled at an international PSI testing center.

**What resources can I take into an exam?**

Please visit <https://ahcc.decisionhealth.com/bmsc-exam-information> to see what materials are allowed when taking your exam. Scroll down the page to “Allowed materials” and under the exam you will see the allowed materials for the specific certification exam. This information is also in the [Candidate Handbook](#). By scheduling a BMSC exam you are acknowledging you have read and agree to the Allowable Resources.

**What is the passing rate of each exam?**

This information is on the AHCC website at <https://ahcc.decisionhealth.com/bmsc-exam-information>.

The passing score for the HCS-D exam is 76%.

The passing score for the HCS-O exam is 74%.

The passing score for the HCS-H exam is 75%.

The passing score for the HCS-C exam is 75%.

Please note that the passing rate of each exam may change with the updated exams every year.

**What if I change my mind and want to cancel my scheduled exam, can I get my money back?**

If you decide to cancel your BMSC exam registration, you must notify DecisionHealth within 30 days prior to your scheduled exam date for a full refund. Candidates registered for BMSC exams have 90 days from the day they register to take an initial or retake exam. If you do not take the exam within those 90 days and do not cancel within the allowed timeframe, your registration fee is non-refundable and non-transferable. Contact customer service to cancel an exam at 1-855-CALL-DH1 or [customer@decisionhealth.com](mailto:customer@decisionhealth.com).

**What if I need more than 90 days to take my initial or retake exam? What should I submit?**

You can be granted an extension, but only under the following special circumstances:

- **Natural disaster:** In the event of bad weather, a natural disaster, or another emergency (for example, a test center power outage)
- **Medical or Personal Emergency:** A medical or personal emergency is an unplanned event that prevents you from taking the exam. A medical or personal emergency may apply to you or one of your immediate family members: spouse, child, or parent as defined by the Family Medical Leave Act. Documentation (such as a doctor’s note, emergency room forms, or

obituary) showing why you could not take your exam will be required.

If you have met one of the above special circumstances, you may request an extension for an exam or certification eligibility period. If the extension is approved, the following fees apply:

1. First Approved Request for an Extension: \$75 (valid for 45 days)
2. Second and Final Approved Request for an Extension: \$150 (valid for an additional 30 days). No additional extension will be authorized.

For all extension requests, please complete and submit the AHCC Request for Consideration form on the AHCC website at <https://ahcc.decisionhealth.com/media/1038/ahcc-request-consideration.pdf>, along with any required documentation. Fees are processed after the request has been approved. Contact customer service at 1-855-CALL-DH1 or [customer@decisionhealth.com](mailto:customer@decisionhealth.com) with any additional questions.

### **Can I cancel my scheduled exam at any time? Or, if I'm not ready, can I just skip my scheduled exam at a PSI computer-based testing center?**

Cancellations made within **3 business days** of a scheduled exam date **at a PSI testing center** are subject to a **\$72 service fee**. Registrants who do not report for the exam at the PSI testing center or at an onsite event, and who do not cancel at least 3 business days before their scheduled exam date are liable for the full registration fee and will be subject to the \$72 service fee. Contact customer service to cancel an exam at 1-855-CALL-DH1 or [customer@decisionhealth.com](mailto:customer@decisionhealth.com).

### **When will I receive my certificate and pin?**

If you passed your exam, you'll receive:

- A congratulatory letter;
- A frameable certificate acknowledging the credential earned and date of certification;
- A score report; and
- A BMSC lapel pin

These items will be sent via USPS within 6 weeks of taking the exam.

### **What jobs can I get with this certification? Is there a job board on your AHCC site?**

To learn more about the core competencies each certification tests, see the [Candidate Handbook](#).

You can access the AHCC job board by visiting and logging in to the AHCC website at <https://ahcc.decisionhealth.com/>, and hovering over "Membership" and then clicking on "Career Center" from the home page.

### **Can I get a detailed breakdown of my exam results?**

You will receive a score report identifying how you performed in each competency area. For more information about how the exams are scored, refer to the [Candidate Handbook](#). To protect the integrity of the examination, BMSC cannot release a candidate's specific answers to questions on any certification examination, nor will BMSC discuss rationale for specific correct answers to examination questions.

## **Exam Retakes**

### **How long must I wait before I can schedule a retake?**

You **must wait at least 3 business days** after you've taken your initial exam to schedule a retake. You have 90 days from your initial exam date to retake the exam. Please note: This also applies to any additional retakes after the first retake exam.

### **How do I register for a retake exam? How can I get to the retake form?**

There is no retake form. To register for your retake exam:

1. Visit <https://ahcc.decisionhealth.com/>.

2. Click the “Login” button at the top right-hand corner of the page and log in.
3. Click the “CEU Tracker” button.
4. Select the certification exam you wish to retake and click “[Retake Now](#)” in the tracker. After you have registered and paid for the retake exam fee, you will receive a confirmation email. Once you receive the confirmation email, you can schedule your retake examination at any PSI testing center.

**Remember!** You must wait at least 3 business days after you’ve taken your initial exam to schedule a retake. This also applies to any additional retakes after the first retake exam.

## Recertification

### How many CEUs are required to recertify?

**You must earn twenty (20) CEUs** between the anniversary date and expiration date of your current credential cycle before you can recertify. To recertify you must:

- Earn ten (10) of the required CEUs by completing your mandatory annual home health coding, OASIS, hospice coding, or home health compliance self-assessments. To view instructions for accessing self-assessments, visit <https://ahcc.decisionhealth.com/maintaining-your-credentials>. CEUs earned from self-assessments are loaded into your tracker by BMSC within three (3) business days.
- Earn the remaining 10 or more CEUs by participating in accepted and qualified CEU activities. Document that activity in your CEU tracker. Make sure to keep any documentation of CEUs for at least one year for auditing purposes.

### What are self-assessments?

Self-assessments are two, fifteen (15) question quizzes that test a certification holder on the most up-to-date information for home health coding, OASIS, hospice coding, or home health compliance. Completing the two self-assessments provides proof of up-to-date training and demonstrates continued competence in home health coding, OASIS accuracy, hospice coding, or home health compliance.

### Do I need to recertify my credential(s) every year (12 months)?

Yes, your BMSC credential (HCS-C, HCS-D, HCS-H, and/or HCS-O) requires an annual recertification to remain active. You must fulfill your annual recertification requirements and submit the applicable fee before your credential expires in order to maintain certification.

### How do I recertify my credential?

Recertification of your credential requires that you earn twenty (20) CEUs between the anniversary date and expiration date of your current credential cycle and paying your recertification fee by your expiration date. These dates are found in your CEU Tracker.

To recertify you must:

- Earn ten (10) or more CEUs by participating in accepted and qualified CEU activities and document that activity in your CEU Tracker. Make sure to keep any documentation of CEUs for at least one year for auditing purposes.
- Earn ten (10) of the required CEUs by completing your mandatory annual home health coding, OASIS, hospice coding, or home health compliance self-assessments. CEUs earned from self-assessments are loaded into your tracker by BMSC within three (3) business days. Please keep this in mind as you are responsible for starting your recertification process early enough to meet the required deadlines. Please keep the self-assessment CEU certificates for your records, in case you are audited.
- Pay your recertification fee by clicking the “Recertify Now” button on your CEU tracker after you have completed your twenty (20) CEUs.



**Is there a grace period to recertify my credential after the expiration date?**

Yes, you have 90 days from the expiration date of your credential to fulfill the recertification requirements. Any recertifications submitted within the 90 days after the credential expires will be subject to a 15% late fee in addition to the recertification fee. Note that 90 days after a credential expires it will be revoked and cannot be recertified.

**There is an Appeal section on the AHCC Request for Consideration form. Can I submit any complaints and issues I have on this form?**

No, there are only **four** instances in which the Appeal form will be reviewed. Certification holders and candidates can request a BMSC review of decisions made or actions taken related to the following **four situations only**:

- Test administration
- Test results
- Certification status (censure, suspension, revocation)
- Denial of continuing education credits

**CEUs****Can I earn BMSC CEUs by earning another BMSC certification?**

No. At this time BMSC has not designated this as a valid CEU activity.

**Do CEUs carry over from one reporting period to another?**

No. You can only report CEUs earned during the current recertification cycle.

**Where and how do I access my CEU Tracker?**

Click on the “CEU Tracker” button at the top right-hand corner on the AHCC website (<https://ahcc.decisionhealth.com/>), and log in to your account.

**Where and how do I access the two mandatory self-assessments?**

Visit the maintaining your credentials page of the AHCC website at <https://ahcc.decisionhealth.com/maintaining-your-credentials>. Under the “Accessing Your Self-Assessments” section, please read and follow the instructions.

**I followed the self-assessments instructions and clicked the “Launch” tab and then “Exams,” but there are no self-assessments showing in my courses. What should I do?**

When you log in to the self-assessments, the archives of past self-assessments will display. You may have selected the wrong courses to launch. Please check that you are clicking the “Launch” tab next to the Self-assessments, then click the “Exams” tab.

**How do I submit CEUs that are not pre-approved by BMSC to see if they would be approved?**

CEUs must be earned within your current recertification cycle and must be *relevant to your specialty credential*. For more information on what types of educational activities qualify, visit the AHCC’s website section on “**Qualifying Continuing Education Activities**” by hovering over the “Certification and Training” drop-down tab. The direct link is <https://ahcc.decisionhealth.com/qualifying-continuing-education-activities>. This information is also in the [Candidate Handbook](#). All CEUs submitted must meet the qualifications outlined here. Please keep the self-assessment CEU certificates for your records, in case you are audited.

**Please note:** BMSC cannot approve CEUs for a non-BMSC event if CEUs were not offered by the sponsoring organization or individual.

**How do I know if CEUs earned at non-BMSC events count toward my recertification requirement?**

The education event sponsor must offer CEUs at the time of the event. You should have a certificate of completion from the education sponsor indicating the number of earned CEUs, the education title, your name and the date of the education. Education topics should directly relate to your certification.

BMSC cannot approve CEUs for an education activity if the original event sponsor did not provide

CEUs. If the education activity meets these requirements, enter the earned CEUs in your tracker and retain your certificate of completion for your records in case you are selected for a random audit.

### **Where can I get CEUs relevant to my specialty credential?**

For a list of the types of educational activities that qualify for CEUs, visit the AHCC website section on “**Qualifying Continuing Education Activities**” at <https://ahcc.decisionhealth.com/qualifying-continuing-education-activities>. This information is also in the [Candidate Handbook](#).

All AHCC members can earn one CEU each month by taking a monthly quiz based on the *AHCC Insider* ezine content. AHCC Premium members can earn additional CEUs by taking a quarterly quiz based on *AHCC Journal* content. Visit the Publications page, <https://ahcc.decisionhealth.com/publications/>, to find a link to your available CEU quizzes.

## **Login and Password issues**

### **I can't log in to the AHCC website. How do I find my login information?**

You can enter your email in the Login screen at <https://ahcc.decisionhealth.com/Login>, click on the “Forgot password” link, and your password will be sent to your email. Please make sure you are entering the email that is associated with your AHCC membership.

If you are still having trouble logging in, please email Customer Service at [customer@decisionhealth.com](mailto:customer@decisionhealth.com) or call 1-855-225-5341 (Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Central Standard Time).

### **I can't remember my password to the AHCC website. How do I reset my password?**

You can reset your password by entering your User Name. Visit <https://ahcc.decisionhealth.com/Login>. In the Login screen, click on the “Forgot password” link. The email to reset your password will be sent to the email that is associated with your AHCC membership.

### **How do I update my email and other personal information for my certification record(s)?**

You can check most of your information by logging into your AHCC account at <https://ahcc.decisionhealth.com/>. At the top right-hand corner of the page, click “My Account.” You can reset your password by clicking the button in your account information. If you need to update your email address and/or other personal information, please email Customer Service at [customer@decisionhealth.com](mailto:customer@decisionhealth.com) or call 1-855-225-5341 (Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Central Standard Time).

### **What is the yearly audit?**

In order to ensure high standards of competency and continuing education, BMSC will conduct an annual audit. A randomly selected, percentage sample of recertification applications submitted from the prior reporting period will be sampled to participate in the audit. If audited, you will be required to provide documented proof of all CEU activity reported during the reporting period to BMSC within 30 days.

If you are unable to provide documented proof within 30 days, your certification will be considered inactive and you will have one year to complete the recertification process by providing the documentation or obtaining new CEUs. All audit documentation is reviewed for completeness and accuracy by BMSC. If all documentation is complete and the appropriate number of CEUs are earned, you will be notified that your credential is valid until the next recertification due date. If, after submission of CEUs, it is determined that some or all CEUs are not applicable, an appropriate amount of time will be allowed for you to earn additional replacement CEUs.

### **Can I be granted an extension beyond the 90 day allowed time frame to take an exam?**

You may be granted an extension, but only under the following special circumstances:

- Natural disaster: In the event of bad weather, a natural disaster, or another emergency (for example, a test center power outage)
- Medical or Personal Emergency: A medical or personal emergency is an unplanned event that prevents you from taking the exam. A medical or personal emergency may apply to

you or one of your immediate family members; spouse, child, or parent as defined by the Family Medical Leave Act. Documentation (such as a doctor's note, emergency room forms, obituary) showing why you could not take your exam will be required.

If the candidate has met one of the above special circumstances, requests an extension for an exam or certification eligibility period, and is approved the extension, the fees that apply are:

1. First Approved Request for an Extension: \$75 (valid for 45 days)
2. Second and Final Approved Request for an Extension: \$150 (valid for an additional 30 days). No additional extension will be authorized.

**Can I get a refund after I register for an exam if I choose not to take the exam?**

If you decide to cancel your BMSC exam registration, you must notify DecisionHealth within 30 days prior to your scheduled exam date for a full refund. Candidates registered for BMSC exams have 90 days from the day they register to take an initial or retake exam. If you do not take the exam within those 90 days and do not cancel within the allowed timeframe, your registration fee is non-refundable and nontransferable.

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## Appendix A – Domains

### HCS-C Exam Domains

**HCS-C Professional Domain Definition:** HCS-C credential holders are professionals with specialized knowledge in establishing, implementing, and monitoring a home health agency’s compliance program, specifically with state and federal regulations related to agency operations. To perform this task, credential holders must possess expertise in understanding and implementation of written policies, procedures and standards of conduct, understanding the 7 elements of a compliance program, ability to administer standards through nationally recognized disciplinary guidelines, and knowledge of the OIG’s standards.

Eighty (80) percent of all CEUs must be earned within HCS-C Domains, which are divided into the areas below.

The following domains outline the primary areas by which the examination questions are constructed. These domains were identified in BMSC’s analysis as the primary competencies of a home health compliance specialist.

#### Domain I: Written Policies and Procedures (14%)

Tasks associated with this domain include:

- Assure you have written policies and procedures and/or standards of conduct that include, but are not limited to:
  - Articulating the organization’s commitment to comply with all applicable federal and state standards.
  - Describing compliance expectations as identified in the standards of conduct.
  - Providing guidance to employees and others on dealing with potential compliance issues.
  - Identifying how to communicate compliance issues to appropriate compliance personnel.
  - Distributing standards of conduct and related policies and procedures to employees within 90 days of hire, when there are updates and annually thereafter.

#### Domain II: Oversight (21%)

Tasks associated with this domain include:

- Assure the compliance officer chosen has required resources including a compliance committee.
- Assure the compliance officer has access to administrative staff and the board of directors.
- Assure the board allocates sufficient funding and staff so that the compliance officer can effectively perform.
- The compliance officer should ensure adequate coordination and training for members.

#### Domain III: Training and Education (19%)

Tasks associated with this domain include:

- Establish, implement and provide effective training and education addressing compliance for all employees including contractors and the board of directors.
- Be certain to maintain records that show all employees and contractors are aware of Medicare requirements related to their job function.

- Be certain to provide special training based on compliance risks on the staff's individual job function.

#### **Domain IV: Lines of Communication (6%)**

Tasks associated with this domain include:

- Be sure standards of conduct require employees and members of the board of directors report compliance concerns to the compliance officer.
- Ensure lines of communication allow for anonymous reporting and maintain confidentiality as much as possible.
- Ensure notification systems are well-publicized throughout the agency and your contractors.

#### **Domain V: Monitoring and Auditing (15%)**

Tasks associated with this domain include:

- Assure the agency has resources available that are devoted to audit functions with current compliance risks and resources.
- Be certain the compliance officer receives regular reporting from individuals conducting auditing activities that show the effectiveness of corrective actions taken.
- Be certain to periodically re-evaluate the accuracy of a baseline risk assessment.

#### **Domain VI: Enforcing Standards/Discipline (11%)**

Tasks associated with this domain include:

- Write policies that include written statements defining the levels of disciplinary actions that may be imposed upon staff members not complying with standards and policies. Policies should specify that disciplinary action should be taken with any employee acting to impede in any part of an investigation.
- Assure employees are aware of disciplinary action will be fair and equitable.

#### **Domain VII: Response and Correction (14%)**

Tasks associated with this domain include:

- Have a system in place where the agency can make reasonable inquiry into all compliance incidents or issues.
- Assure you have policies outlining just how to take appropriate corrective action that:
  - Are designed to correct and prevent future non-compliance, including a root cause analysis;
  - are tailored to address the problem or deficiency identified;
  - include timeframes for specific actions to be taken;
  - and assure the agency maintains thorough documentation of all compliance deficiencies identified and corrective actions taken.

### **HCS-D Exam Domains**

**HCS-D Professional Domain Definition:** HCS-D professionals improve the quality of healthcare by ensuring the timeliest information and resources available are used for accurate coding. The profession encompasses services in analyzing, and disseminating individual patient clinical

diagnostic data. It serves the following healthcare stakeholders: patients, providers, patient care organizations, research and policy agencies, payers, and other healthcare-related entities.

Eighty (80) percent of all CEUs must be earned within HCS-D Domains, which are divided into the areas below.

### **1. Domain I: Collect patient documentation (10%)**

Tasks associated with this domain include:

- Obtain patient documentation
- Ensure the completeness of the patient documentation

### **2. Domain II: Assign accurate diagnosis codes (65%)**

Tasks associated with this domain include:

- Review diagnosis codes
- Assign accurate diagnosis codes from the ICD-10 CM classification system
- Sequence the diagnosis codes
- Validate diagnosis codes using coding conventions and guidelines
- Ensure that the patient documentation supports the assigned codes

### **3. Domain III: Collaborate with clinicians, physicians and/or managers/administrators (10%)**

Tasks associated with this domain include:

- Query clinicians, physicians, or managers/administrators about incomplete information, additional information, or documentation deficiencies
- Obtain clinician agreement with code assignment and sequencing
- Train clinicians, physicians and/or managers/administrators about changes to coding protocols

### **4. Domain IV: Ensure that all activities are done in a legal and ethical manner that supports agency policy, regulatory and professional guidelines (15%)**

- Maintain patient confidentiality, privacy, and security
- Conduct activities in a legal, ethical, and professional manner
- Archive and retrieve patient documentation related to the medical record

## **HCS-H Exam Domains**

**HCS-H Professional Domain Definition:** HCS-H professionals improve the quality of healthcare by ensuring the timeliest information and resources available are used for accurate coding. The profession encompasses services in analyzing, and disseminating individual patient clinical diagnostic data. It serves the following healthcare stakeholders: patients, providers, patient care organizations, research and policy agencies, payers, and other healthcare-related entities.

Eighty (80) percent of all CEUs must be earned within HCS-H Domains, which are divided into the areas below.

**1. Domain I: Collect patient documentation (8%)**

Tasks associated with this domain include:

- Obtain patient documentation
- Ensure the completeness of the patient documentation

**2. Domain II: Assign accurate diagnosis codes (71%)**

Tasks associated with this domain include:

- Review diagnosis codes
- Assign accurate diagnosis codes from the ICD-10 CM classification system
- Sequence the diagnosis codes
- Validate diagnosis codes using coding conventions and guidelines
- Ensure that the patient documentation supports the assigned codes

**3. Domain III: Collaborate with clinicians, physicians and/or managers/administrators (11%)**

Tasks associated with this domain include:

- Query clinicians, physicians, or managers/administrators about incomplete information, additional information, or documentation deficiencies
- Obtain clinician agreement with code assignment and sequencing
- Train clinicians, physicians and/or managers/administrators about changes to coding protocols

**4. Domain IV: Ensure that all activities are done in a legal and ethical manner that supports agency policy, regulatory and professional guidelines (10%)**

- Maintain patient confidentiality, privacy, and security
- Conduct activities in a legal, ethical, and professional manner
- Archive and retrieve patient documentation related to the medical record

**HCS-O Exam Domains**

**HCS-O Professional Domain Definition:** HCS-O credential holders are professionals with specialized knowledge in applying clinical assessment findings to Medicare specific data collection items. To perform this task, they must possess and demonstrate expertise in the understanding and application of Medicare instruction contained in the OASIS guidance manual, Category specific Questions and Answers and quarterly updates.

Eighty (80) percent of all CEUs must be earned within HCS-O Domains, which are divided into the areas below.

**Domain I: Gather patient clinical documentation (35%)**

Tasks associated with this domain include:

- Obtain comprehensive assessment including drug regimen review
- Obtain any additional summaries such as discharge summaries and other documentation provided by physician and or facility
- Obtain any prior agency documentation from previous encounters
- Ensure the completeness of the patient documentation

**Domain II: Validate the accuracy of OASIS responses (40%)**

Tasks associated with this domain include:

- Apply the basic rationale behind OASIS guidance
- Identify the correct OASIS responses based on the comprehensive assessment
- Ensure that the patient documentation supports the OASIS responses
- Ensure the comprehensive assessment is based on the OASIS guidelines and resources
- Access official OASIS guidance as needed

**Domain III: Correct OASIS response errors according to OASIS guidance and documentation standards (25%)**

Tasks associated with this domain include:

- Identify errors in OASIS responses
- Obtain clinician agreement on modifications to the OASIS responses
- Correct response errors in the absence of the assessing clinician
- Maintain the documentation of corrections



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## Appendix B – Competencies

### Home Health Compliance Specialist Competencies

**Technology:** Application of existing and emerging technologies for the collection of clinical data, the transformation of clinical data to useful health information, and the communication and protection of information on analog (for example, paper) or electronic media (for example, web based software).

Topics include, but are not limited to:

- Electronic health records (EHRs)
- Software applications (encoders, patient information management systems, chart management and electronic queries.)
- Personal health record (PHR)

**Clinical Data Management:** Applications and analysis of quality and clinical resources appropriate to the clinical setting. Includes database management, clinical documentation improvement, and compliance using the current regulatory guidance to ensure quality and cost effectiveness of the rendered services (for example, data integrity and quality of documentation).

Topics include, but are not limited to:

- Prospective payment system (PPS)
- OASIS User Manual
- Medicare Processing Claims Manual
- Medicare Conditions of Participation
- Medicare Federal Register
- ICD-10-CM Classification System

**External Forces:** Study of regulatory requirements and the development of appropriate compliance initiatives for policies, procedures, protocols, and technology for home health and hospice providers.

Topics include, but are not limited to:

- OIG
- HIPAA
- Compliance
- Legal or regulatory update

**Clinical Foundations:** Understanding of human anatomy and physiology; the nature of disease processes; and the protocols of diagnosis and treatment of major diseases to include common drugs and laboratory and other tests used for the diagnosis and treatment of disease. Practice the ability to apply this knowledge to the reading, documentation, and abstracting of medical information to support quality patient care and associated databases. Topics include, but are not limited to:

- Pathophysiology
- Pharmacology
- Anatomy and physiology

**Medical terminology:**

- Clinical documentation
- Diagnostic and laboratory testing
- Telemedicine

**Privacy and Security:** Understanding and application of current healthcare regulations that promote protection of medical information and the electronic transmission of health information. Topics include, but are not limited to:

- Release of information
- Confidentiality
- Personal health information security

## Home Health Coding Specialist Competencies

1. **Technology:** Application of existing and emerging technologies for the collection of clinical data, the transformation of clinical data to useful health information, and the communication and protection of information on analog (for example, paper ) or electronic media (for example, web based software). Topics include, but are not limited to:
  - Electronic health records (EHRs)
  - Software applications (encoders, patient information management systems, chart management and electronic queries.)
  - Personal health record (PHR)
2. **Clinical Data Management:** Applications and analysis of quality and clinical resources appropriate to the clinical setting. Includes database management, clinical documentation improvement, and coding compliance using the current classification system within the prospective or payment system to ensure quality and cost effectiveness of the rendered services (for example, data integrity and quality of documentation). Topics include, but are not limited to:
  - Prospective payment system (PPS)
  - ICD-10-CM
  - HHRG
  - RAC
  - ZPIC
  - Patient-Driven Groupings Model (PDGM)
3. **External Forces:** Study of regulatory requirements and the development of appropriate compliance initiatives for policies, procedures, protocols, and technology for home health and hospice providers. Topics include, but are not limited to:
  - OIG
  - HIPAA
  - Compliance
  - Legal or regulatory update
4. **Clinical Foundations:** Understanding of human anatomy and physiology; the nature of disease processes; and the protocols of diagnosis and treatment of major diseases to include common drugs and laboratory and other tests used for the diagnosis and treatment of disease. Practice the ability to apply this knowledge to the reading, coding, and abstracting of medical information to support quality patient care and associated databases. Topics include, but are not limited to:
  - Pathophysiology
  - Pharmacology
  - Anatomy and physiology
  - Medical terminology

- Clinical documentation
- Diagnostic and laboratory testing
- Telemedicine

## Hospice Coding Specialist Competencies

1. **Technology:** Application of existing and emerging technologies for the collection of clinical data, the transformation of clinical data to useful health information, and the communication and protection of information on analog (for example, paper ) or electronic media (for example, web based software). Topics include, but are not limited to:
  - Electronic health records (EHRs)
  - Software applications (encoders, patient information management systems, chart management and electronic queries.)
  - Personal health record (PHR)
2. **Clinical Data Management:** Applications and analysis of quality and clinical resources appropriate to the clinical setting. Includes database management, clinical documentation improvement, and coding compliance using the current classification system within the prospective or payment system to ensure quality and cost effectiveness of the rendered services (for example, data integrity and quality of documentation). Topics include, but are not limited to:
  - Hospice payment system
  - ICD-10-CM
  - RAC
  - ZPIC
3. **External Forces:** Study of regulatory requirements and the development of appropriate compliance initiatives for policies, procedures, protocols, and technology for home health and hospice providers. Topics include, but are not limited to:
  - OIG
  - HIPAA
  - Compliance
  - Legal or regulatory update
4. **Clinical Foundations:** Understanding of human anatomy and physiology; the nature of disease processes; and the protocols of diagnosis and treatment of major diseases to include common drugs and laboratory and other tests used for the diagnosis and treatment of disease. Practice the ability to apply this knowledge to the reading, coding, and abstracting of medical information to support quality patient care and associated databases. Topics include, but are not limited to:
  - Pathophysiology
  - Pharmacology
  - Anatomy and physiology
  - Medical terminology
  - Clinical documentation
  - Diagnostic and laboratory testing
  - Telemedicine

**Privacy and Security:** Understanding and application of current healthcare regulations that promote protection of medical information and the electronic transmission of health information. Topics include, but are not limited to:

- Release of information
- Confidentiality
- Personal health information security

### **OASIS Specialist Competencies**

**Technology:** Application of existing and emerging technologies for the collection of clinical data, the transformation of clinical data to useful health information, and the communication and protection of information on analog (for example, paper) or electronic media (for example, web based software). Topics include, but are not limited to:

- Electronic health records (EHRs)
- Software applications (encoders, patient information management systems, chart management and electronic queries.)
- Personal health record (PHR)

**Clinical Data Management:** Applications and analysis of quality and clinical resources appropriate to the clinical setting. Includes database management, clinical documentation improvement, and compliance using the current OASIS and Medicare regulatory guidance to ensure quality and cost effectiveness of the rendered services (for example, data integrity and quality of documentation). Topics include, but are not limited to:

- Prospective payment system (PPS)
- Patient-Driven Groupings Model (PDGM)
- OASIS User Manual
- Medicare Processing Claims Manual
- Medicare Conditions of Participation
- Medicare Federal Register
- ICD-10-CM Classification System

**External Forces:** Study of regulatory requirements and the development of appropriate compliance initiatives for policies, procedures, protocols, and technology for home health and hospice providers. Topics include, but are not limited to:

- OIG
- HIPAA
- Compliance
- Legal or regulatory update

**Clinical Foundations:** Understanding of human anatomy and physiology; the nature of disease processes; and the protocols of diagnosis and treatment of major diseases to include common drugs and laboratory and other tests used for the diagnosis and treatment of disease. Practice the ability to apply this knowledge to the reading, documentation, and abstracting of medical information to support quality patient care and associated databases. Topics include, but are not limited to:

- Pathophysiology
- Pharmacology
- Anatomy and physiology

**Medical terminology:**

- Clinical documentation
- Diagnostic and laboratory testing
- Telemedicine

**Privacy and Security:** Understanding and application of current healthcare regulations that promote protection of medical information and the electronic transmission of health information. Topics include, but are not limited to:

- Release of information
- Confidentiality
- Personal health information security



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