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By: Avery Hurt | June 8, 2015

Let's do a little thought experiment. It's Oct. 1, 2015. ICD-10 has gone live. What kind of shape are you in? Everyone on your staff has been trained, you've got some cash put aside or a line of credit to tide you over in case of delayed payments, your systems have been upgraded and tested.

What have you forgotten?

"No matter how well prepared you are," said Ken Bradley, vice president of strategic planning and regulatory compliance at medical claims clearinghouse Navicure, "the unexpected will happen, and perhaps the best thing you can do to be prepared for that is to make sure that come Oct. 1 you have all hands on deck and everyone is rested and ready."

Sounds simple enough, but like everything ICD-10, it's not something you want to put off until the last minute. A little strategic planning is called for to make sure your office isn't in a state of frantic exhaustion when the long-awaited day finally arrives and ICD-10 becomes a reality. Christine Lee, manager of provider practice services with Care Communications, a health information management consulting firm, offered a few tips to make sure your team is ready to go come Oct. 1.

- This fall is not a good time to schedule vacations. "Lots of vacations are happening around Labor Day and Thanksgiving, but some organizations have put a moratorium on off-time during the period surrounding the transition," said Lee. "You might want to consider doing that, too. Make sure everyone enjoys the summer and is ready to put their heads down and tackle ICD-10 come fall."
- Lee also advised making sure any pet projects are wrapped up and backlogs cleared up well before October. You obviously don't want to have the extra work overlapping with the ICD-10 transition, but you also don't want everyone exhausted from other projects either, so clear the decks in plenty of time to make sure you have a little calm before the ICD-10 storm.
- A key part of being "rested and ready" is being confident, said Lee. "If you can, bring in an outside speaker to motivate and encourage your team and perhaps ... gauge how everyone is doing. You've trained and tested and tested and trained, but having someone from the outside bring in a few examples for your coders to work [with] can really increase their confidence. It's a way to say, 'Yes, you're really going to be able to do this.'" Lee did this with the coders at Care and was very pleased with the results. "It really increased their confidence and took some of the pressure off. And if you do this and find that your coders aren't ready, you'll know in time to do some remedial work," she said.