



2009 CDI Professional of the Year

## Montefiore's Kennedy earns well-deserved CDI kudos

Despite being dubbed a “one-of-a-kind” individual, ACDIS 2009 CDI Professional of the Year award winner **Elizabeth (Beth) Kennedy, RN, CCS**, says the success of her program stems from the hard work of her team.

“We wouldn't have been successful without the great group of individuals I've been privileged to work with,” says Kennedy, clinical manager of the documentation improvement program at Montefiore Medical Center in the Bronx, NY. She accepted her award during a luncheon at the second annual ACDIS conference Thursday, May 14, in Las Vegas.

**“In the past 18 months, I feel that we have had a breakthrough in physician acceptance of documentation improvement, both in its importance to the organization and to their [physician] practices.”**

—Gary Kalkut, MD, MPH

Although Montefiore houses its CDI program under utilization review, Kennedy's team is dedicated to the task of documentation review and improvement. It's a team that includes 10 nurses and three CDI managers for Montefiore's more than 1,500-bed system. Kennedy not only educated these associates, but designed the facility program. The growth has been “mind-boggling,” she says.



ACDIS Director Brian Murphy recognizes the 2009 CDI Professional of the Year award winner, Elizabeth Kennedy.

### CDI programs have seen some growth

Kennedy began her career as an RN at St. Mary's Hospital in Brooklyn, NY, where she worked in critical care, on the medical-surgical unit, in labor and delivery, and in pediatrics. But as healthcare costs continued to rise, she began to wonder about the effect on cost containment and its ultimate effect on patient care. So in 1988, she took a position with the healthcare consulting arm of Ernst and Whinney in New York. There, Kennedy spent two years assessing quality documentation areas and DRG assignment. When her children were young, she cut back her hours and slowed her high-paced lifestyle to work part-time primarily on DRG validation.

“My time there helped me understand the essentials of complete documentation,” she says. “DRG validation helped me to understand the essentials of complete documentation.”

### Kennedy continues CDI improvement

Coupled with Kennedy's 30 years of nursing experience with her 20-plus years of experience in DRG and documentation to produce what **Ann Marie Carducci, RN, MPA, CPHQ, CPUR, CPC, CCS**, director of utilization management at Montefiore, calls the “ideal associate to jump-start a documentation improvement program.”

In fact, Montefiore began its CDI program more than five years ago, but **Gary Kalkut, MD, MPH**, senior vice president and chief medical officer at Montefiore, credits that “jump-start” Carducci mentioned primarily to Kennedy's abilities.

“Since Beth joined us, our program has had significantly more impact, which I attribute to Beth's efforts,” Kalkut wrote in his nomination letter. “In the past 18 months, I feel that we have had a breakthrough in physician acceptance of documentation improvement, both in its importance to the organization and to their [physician] practices. Through her design of a documentation improvement curriculum and tireless initiative to educate physicians, our program has made big, sustainable strides forward.”

### Educational outreach key to Kennedy's success

Educating physicians may be CDI specialists' most challenging task, and Kennedy doesn't deny it. You can hear the

pride in her voice as she recounts the various physician training programs she instituted during tenure at Montefiore.

Such modest satisfaction is more than justified, says Carducci, who listed the many ways Kennedy connects with various healthcare stakeholders. These include:

- » Creating posters and pocket cards
- » Writing CDI articles for inclusion in the monthly physician newsletter
- » Collaborating with HIM staff members to revise procedure notes

“She also presented at our medical center’s quarterly physician staff meeting twice, essentially teaching the providers ‘what they don’t know they don’t know,’ ” Carducci says.

One of the most important messages Kennedy carries to physicians is one of empathy and understanding, Carducci says. She explains how the clinical education they received in medical school does not necessarily translate into the language of coding.

“Beth skillfully extracts real medical record entries, poses appropriate queries to small groups of physicians, and ultimately convinces the physicians that further specifying a patient’s diagnosis or better explaining a procedure best explains what has occurred with a patient,” Carducci says.

In the past, DRG validation programs focused on retrospective reviews and back-end analysis, says Kennedy. “We didn’t have any real-time interaction with the records, patients, or outcomes,” she says. With the advent of the MS-DRG system and increased government scrutiny on documentation—not just for reimbursement accuracy, but also on quality-of-care indicators—CDI programs are taking an increasingly important place in the healthcare system.

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—Elizabeth Kenney, RN, CCS

“The MS-DRG system simply isn’t intuitive,” Kennedy says. “There’s no easy way to definitively describe this to a physician so it makes sense to them. That’s really been the biggest change and challenge I’ve seen over the years.”

If it weren’t for the high level of support she’s received since her arrival at Montefiore, Kennedy says she’s not sure she would have been able to make such great strides. “I’ve really had nice experiences throughout my career,” she says. “It takes a tremendous amount of support. We’ve been so lucky.” 🌸

## ACDIS recognizes two CDI specialists for professional achievement

In addition to honoring Elizabeth Kennedy with the CDI Professional of the Year award, the ACDIS second annual conference committee also lauded two ACDIS members with awards for Recognition of CDI Professional Achievement. The winners were **Lynne Spryszak, RN, CPC-A, CCDS**, senior consultant at FTI Healthcare in Brentwood, TN (and formerly of Alexian Brothers Medical Center), and **Wendy Clesi, RN, CCDS**, director of the documentation excellence department at Ochsner Health System in New Orleans.

### Spryszak leads by dedication

Spryszak was nominated by Deborah Obrochta, RN, BSN, CDI specialist in the clinical documentation management program at Alexian Brothers Medical Center. Obrochta said:

*Lynne has very successfully built a clinical documentation program during her seven years at Alexian Brothers Medical Center in Elk Grove, IL. She created an atmosphere of professionalism that earned the department high regard from hospital administration. Furthermore, Lynne fostered a climate of teamwork with the HIM department.*



ACDIS Director Brian Murphy honors Lynne Spryszak with the 2009 award for Recognition of CDI Professional Achievement.

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## ACDIS recognizes two CDI specialists for professional achievement (cont.)

*As department coordinator, Lynne always went beyond the call of duty. She spent long days at work and extra time at home to accomplish department goals. Lynne provided education, support, and resources to the team, leading them by her example, hard work, and dedication. She was always there to listen and often showed her appreciation to the team.*

*Lynne has been a member of ACDIS since its inception. She always strives for excellence in all that she does and constantly has an eye toward the future of the field.*

### Clesi's quality motto inspires coworkers

Clesi was nominated by her colleagues at Ochsner Baptist Medical Center, including Mary Beth Caluda, Jennifer Noel, and Christine Kasner, who stated the following:

*Wendy Clesi is an inspirational leader. She has the ability to educate, motivate, and inspire ... with her vision of accuracy as*



ACDIS Director Brian Murphy honors Wendi Clesi with the 2009 award for Recognition of CDI Professional Achievement.

*the guiding light in the documentation improvement process. As the director of the documentation excellence department of Ochsner Health System, a not-for-profit teaching and research hospital with five community hospitals in the region and many neighborhood clinics, Wendy developed the tools which enabled the department to expand from one documentation specialist to 18 employees systemwide.*

*Her dedication and skills have helped Ochsner Health System survive the communitywide devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and strengthened Ochsner's position in the ever more competitive healthcare market.*

*Her dedication to ongoing education is impressive. Whether it's educating 200 new residents or the most seasoned surgeon, Wendy's message is clear: Accurate documentation will favorably influence quality of care. Her vision has improved healthcare for the patients of the Ochsner Health System.*

### Additional nominees named

ACDIS wants to recognize all the hard-working CDI specialists who help make a difference in the quality of medical record documentation.

If you would like to nominate a colleague who has helped launch a successful CDI program in your hospital, for example, or who has made an outstanding contribution to the field of CDI, ACDIS is now seeking nominations for our 2010 CDI Professional of the Year award.

A committee will choose one winner and two Professional Achievement award nominees. The professional of the year winner will receive one free admission to the 2010 conference, to be held in Chicago. To submit a nomination, visit [www.cdiasociation.com](http://www.cdiasociation.com) and click on Annual Award.

The following CDI specialists were nominated for the 2009 Professional of the Year award by their peers:

- » **Kristine M. Cilon, RN**, documentation improvement specialist, Mercy Medical Center, Canton, OH
- » **Linda Cooper, RN, CPUR**, documentation specialist, Saint Joseph's/Candler Health System, Savannah, GA
- » **Pam Felty**, clinical documentation specialist, Ochsner Health System, New Orleans
- » **Karen Houston**, director of quality and continuum of care, Albany (NY) Medical Center
- » **Michele Johnson, RN**, supervisor, clinical documentation specialists, Wellspan Health, York, PA
- » **Michelle Manning, RN**, clinical documentation specialist, Brookdale Hospital Medical Center, Brooklyn, NY
- » **Mary Mills, RHIT, CCS**, president of Documentation Solutions, LLC, Dearborn Heights, MI
- » **Kathryn Schulze**, director of clinical documentation management, The Methodist Hospital, Houston
- » **Abby Steelhammer**, CDI manager, Novant Health/SPR, Charlotte, NC
- » **Amanda Torbert**, CDI specialist, coder, Providence (RI) Health Center
- » **Alison Yazmer, RN, BSN, CCM**, Middlesex Hospital, Middletown, CT