

# CONSIDERATIONS FOR HIRING ABSTRACTORS

Special consideration should be placed on the selection of the medical record abstractors for a Maternal Mortality Review Committee (MMRC). The expertise and skill of the individual abstractor is closely tied to the quality of information that is presented to the review committee and ultimately to the accuracy of identified issues and recommendations for improvement.

The abstractor represents the MMRC while out in the field and holds a great deal of responsibility to ensure the protection and confidentiality of the information gathered. Therefore, it is of utmost importance for all medical record abstractors to demonstrate professionalism and have a full understanding of the authority and/or legislative parameters under which they operate. Abstractors should receive initial and ongoing training with regards to appropriate practice.

The abstractor typically reviews and abstracts information from death certificates, birth certificates, fetal death certificates, medical and hospitalization records, autopsies and social service records. Contacting hospitals and arranging access to medical records for assigned cases may be the responsibility of the abstractor alone or may be divided between an abstractor and a program coordinator. The abstractor typically receives assigned cases from a program coordinator and then abstracts them within a specified time period. The abstractor is responsible for reviewing records at each hospital, filling out appropriate abstraction forms, writing a case narrative, and providing additional information on each case based on clinical documentation in the records. While most records are found at area hospitals, the abstractor may be required to gather information from other types of facilities. The abstractor will typically attend review committee meetings and report to a program coordinator.

## Ideal Abstractor Qualifications:

- Nursing experience in obstetrics, antenatal, and postpartum care - minimum of five years
- Demonstrated understanding of normal/abnormal processes of pregnancy, delivery, and postpartum and the wide spectrum of factors that can influence maternal outcomes
- Demonstrated strong professional communication skills (phone, email, fax, verbal)
- Computer skills, including data entry experience and ability to navigate a variety of electronic medical record systems
- Experience in medical record review (peer review, FIMR, etc.)
- Flexibility and ability to accomplish tasks in short time frames.
- Demonstrated appreciation of the community
- Knowledge of HIPAA and confidentiality laws
- Ability to serve as an objective, unbiased storyteller; not looking to assign blame
- Demonstrated understanding of social determinants contributing to maternal mortality
- Possessor of own automobile with valid insurance (if on-site abstraction is required).

States have differing needs for abstractor personnel and hours. Refer to [Review to Action website](#) for assistance in calculating the number of hours of abstraction required for your committee each year and the associated costs.

Abstracting is a taxing job and abstractors need support from the committee and from other staff. Before hiring an abstractor, decide who your abstractor will report to and who he or she can go to for questions, concerns, and emotional support.