Practical Solutions to the Challenges Facing Physician Office Billing Departments

Presenters:
Susan B. May
And
David Haier

Practical Solutions - Staff

- What **Billing Office staff** needs to know to maximize revenue and still be compliant

*This is not legal advice. Federal and State laws may impact this subject matter, so you are on notice that you should get legal counsel.

Practical Solutions - Patients

- Billing Office policies to work **with patients** to improve Accounts Receivable

*This is not legal advice. Federal and State laws may impact this subject matter, so you are on notice that you should get legal counsel.

Practical Solutions - Physicians

- How to **motivate physicians** to take a more proactive role

*This is not legal advice. Federal and State laws may impact this subject matter, so you are on notice that you should get legal counsel.

Practical Solutions – Case Study

- Example/Case Study:

  Electronic Charge Capture as one group's tool of choice to increase physician coding/billing compliance will be presented

What Billing Office Staff needs to know to maximize revenue and still be compliant

- Staffing Issues
- Setting Expectations
- Training and Monitoring
- Payer Issues

Staffing Issues

Evaluation

- Billing manager should take time to write down how each position impacts the billing functions

Current Staff

- Each staff member needs to know how his/her job touches other jobs and how those other jobs impact their own work.
- Explain how each staff member is part of the team and teach how job affects the income to the practice and the staff.
- Example: Patient misidentification.

Staffing Issues

New Staff

- Hire for Attitude. Train for Success.

- Make sure you set a minimum standard:
  Background checks
  Communication skills
  Team attitude
  Detail-oriented

- Make sure the candidate understands the job expectations

Staff - Setting Out Expectations

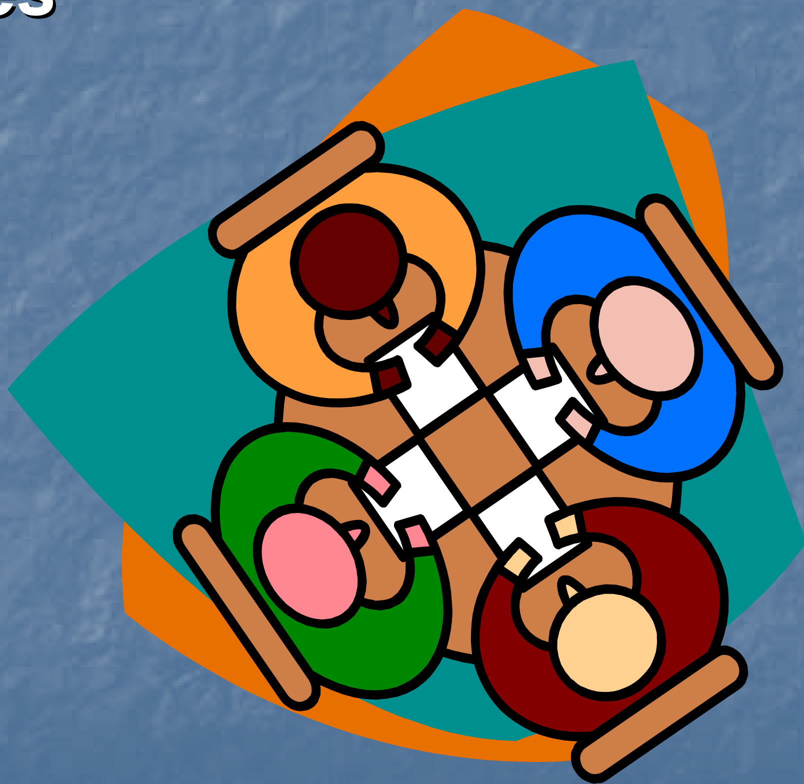
Managers

- Must set the “Tone at the Top”
- Be familiar with laws and regulations affecting billing
- Be familiar with contract requirements affecting billing
- Foster “culture of compliance”
- Important: Set tone that it is OK to report and question

Staff - Setting Out Expectations

Company-wide Policies

- Code of Conduct
- Conflict of Interest



Staff

- “Require” buy in

Outsiders

Staff - Training and Monitoring

- **Contributes to the culture of professionalism**

- **New employee training**
  - **Billing staff**
  - **Providers**

- **Ongoing training**
  - **Staff meetings**
  - **Postings**
  - **Circulating information (and sign off!)**

- **Monitoring program**
  - **“Buy in” on the front end (top management support!)**
  - **Can increase funds due to improved coding**
  - **Can decrease losses due to errors, repayments**

Staff - Payer Issues

Each payer has its own rules.

Staff needs to know there are differences:

- Medicare
- Commercial
- Self-pay

Billing Office Policies to Work <u>with Patients</u> to Improve Accounts Receivable

- Patient Data Collection and Proper Patient Identification

- Patient Financial Policies

Patient Data Collection

- Misidentification Problems

true examples…

Misidentification – Example #1

A family receives the bill for a pregnancy test for their daughter who is away at college – this is surprising news to them! They are furious with their daughter and have a falling out with her. They are even more upset when they find out the test was not for their daughter at all, but was really for a woman with a similar name.

Misidentification – Example #2

A man who is a “fitness nut” gets a bill for treatment of obesity-related issues. Not only is he distressed that the doctor’s office messed up his billing, but he wonders if the office can eliminate all traces of this from his record so this diagnosis does not go forward with him on insurance records.

Misidentification – Example #3

A woman receives a bill for medical services rendered to her husband who passed away a year ago. Even though the bill was intended for someone else, it is a very painful reminder of her loss.

Misidentification – Example #4

Jack, Jr. calls to tell us that he received his father bill for a blood test. In addition to complaining about receiving the bill, he also warns that Jack, Sr. is going to be mighty upset as they have been estranged for 3 years and he will not appreciate it that the son to whom he is not speaking got this information.

Jack, Sr. IS indeed very upset saying this was an invasion of his privacy and we will be hearing from his lawyer.

Misidentification – Example #5

Jane Doe (DOB 11/22/24) lets you know she got the bill for a pregnancy lab test and wonders why. The bill should have been sent to Jane Doe (DOB 11/22/84).

Misidentification Results

In each of these cases, an error occurred because a staff member was careless and selected the WRONG patient.

This causes:

- **Distress to the patient**
- **Privacy violations**
- **Embarrassment for the company**
- **Re-work/lost revenue**

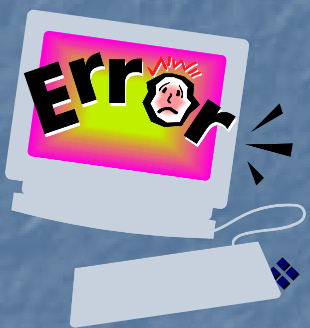
Misidentification Results

What we have to do in these cases:

- Apologize to the persons involved – on the phone (with documentation recording the apology) and/or by writing a letter of apology.
- Log the inappropriate disclosure in the HIPAA disclosure log.
- Reverse the charges from the incorrect patient's account.

- Correct the billing so that it goes to the correct patient (note delay in AR).

Misidentification Results…continued



- Contact the insurance companies and all appropriate payers to correct the mistake (documenting all interactions in the patients' records).

- Involve the Legal Department and/or Compliance Officer if legal complications result.

- Be investigated by the Office of Civil Rights if a formal complaint is made by the patient.

Proper Identification Procedures

- Must have a written look-up procedure

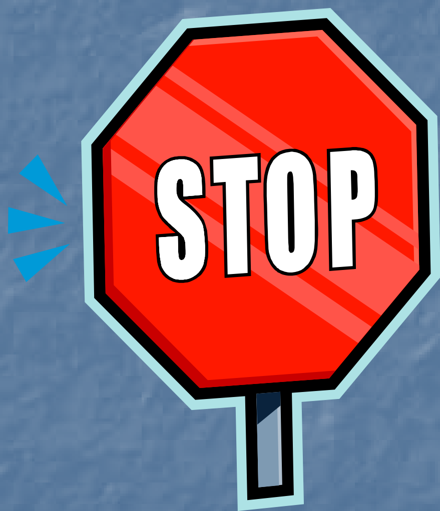
- Must educate staff about the importance/impact of proper look up

- Must have consequences for mistakes

NOTE: Proper policies/procedures bolster HIPAA Privacy compliance!

Proper Identification Procedures

- See handout included



STOP PATIENT MISIDENTIFICATION!

Patient Financial Policies

WHY??

What to cover in your written policies:

- **Explain your process in simple/layperson terms**
- **Explain patient responsibilities vis-a-vis the insurance company**
  - **Fee/charge/payment amount**
  - **Pre-certification/prior authorizations/referrals**
  - **EOB**
- **Explain payment expectations**
  - **At time of services**
  - **Other fees:**
    - **Returned checks - Completion of forms**
    - **No show - Prescription refills**
    - **After hour calls**
    - **Processing fee for failure to pay co-pay at time of visit**

Patient Financial Policies… continued

- **Special circumstances**
  - **Workers' compensation**
  - **Motor vehicle / other accident**
  - **Divorced parents**
  - **Medicaid**

- **Payment options**
  - **Credit cards on account**

- **See Sample**

- **BE SURE TO GET THIS SIGNED BY THE PATIENT!**

The Confusing World of Patient Options

- FSA Account
- HSA Account
- Regular Credit Cards
- All in One Card
- Security Issues with Credit Cards

- Check your local rules, regulations, laws (get legal advice) regarding your patient financial policy – especially if extending credit.

Motivating Physicians to Take a More Proactive Role

Appropriately involve physicians so that they understand their role on the "billing team"

- Importance of understanding coding and documentation requirements.
- Keeping current with changes; i.e., change in physical therapy requirements.
- Decisions regarding patient status such as discounting, hardship, termination from practice.
- "New" organization strategies should include billing input before final decision.

Example/Case Study

- Electronic Charge Capture as one group's tool of choice to increase physician coding/billing compliance will be presented….