

Optometry Coding & Billing Alert

Carve Out Time to Prioritize for Successful Small Practice Billing

Expert tips show how a biller can 'wear many hats' and make it look good

As a biller in a small optometry practice, do you often feel overwhelmed by the multitude of tasks in your job description? Stress no more - some simple time-management tips can help you juggle your many duties like a pro.

Larger practices are able to split duties among many billing staff members, but smaller practices often ask one or two employees to shoulder all of the billing office's burdens, plus receptionist and medical-assistant duties. The answer? Find a segment of uninterrupted time each day to devote to the top billing priorities, says **Maggie Mac, CMM, CPC, CMSCS, CCP, ICCE**, administrator at Bay Area Women's Care in Clearwater, Fla.

Focus on 4 Top Billing Priorities

1. **Make sure you enter and account for charges each day**, says **Angela Rochelle**, administrator at Carolina Optometry Group of Chapel Hill PA, in Chapel Hill, N.C.
2. **Transmit charges regularly**. Even if your office sees only 15 patients a day, you should transmit charges often, perhaps even daily, to keep your payment flow even, says **Terri Fischer, CPC, CMC**, senior consultant with Health Care Group in St. Louis.
3. **Enter payments in quickly**. Don't set denials aside for later, Fischer says. If you didn't receive payment on a claim, you need to act quickly to correct the problem.
4. **Work your A/R report**. Small practices neglect this step most often, Fischer says. But you can lose a lot of money if you send out charges and enter payments but never follow up on denials, unpaid claims and outstanding balances.

Find More Time for Billing

You know what you have to do, but you have to find the time to do it! "There are a lot of things you can do that will cut an hour or two out of the week," Fischer says. A few hours may not seem like much, yet they can be enough to increase your practice's revenue if you address neglected billing duties, she adds. Here are some timesaving tactics to try:

1. **Shut the phones off early**, either an hour before lunch or an hour before closing time. This works best if your office has an answering service because you can direct any emergencies to the back-office line, Mac says. Without the distraction of phone calls, you'll be able to spend some time entering the day's charges, appealing denials, etc.
2. **Chart your workweek activities** to identify where you could save time or be more efficient. Divide each day into morning and afternoon slots and then write down everything you do and how long you spend on each activity, Fischer says. You'll discover that there are times during the week when you could be more productive or when you could use other resources to free up more time.

You might also realize that you just have too much on your plate, she adds. In this case, you'll have everything written down and be able to negotiate with your employer about the possibility of hiring more help or investing in better timesaving technologies.

3. **Plan ahead to focus on billing** when your physician takes a half-day off or schedules work outside the office. Examine the week's schedule in advance and take advantage of any time when patients won't be in the office, Mac says.
4. **Hire part-time help** to assist with redundant, time-consuming tasks like filing and pulling charts, answering the phones and taking messages, Mac says. This will free up some of your precious time to spend on more important billing matters that require your expertise. Paying a biller good money to file charts just doesn't make sense, Mac says.
5. **Use a lock box at your bank.** For a fee, your bank will receive your payments in the mail and deposit the checks into your account, then send you all the original documentation, Fischer says. This reduces the risk of mistakes, mishandling, theft and fraud when one staff person opens the mail and posts payments.
6. **Take advantage of clearinghouse services.** If you print your statements in-house and spend a lot of time stuffing envelopes, you would be better off asking your clearinghouse do this for you, Fischer says. Then you can spend more time working accounts you've avoided and recoup more payments.