

Optometry Coding & Billing Alert

Collections Corner: No-Show Charge Is a No-No Without Patient Notification

Many optometry offices give patients 1 -free- no-show

When a patient fails to show up for a scheduled eye examination, you lose time and money, but collecting for no-shows and determining when to start charging aren't always easy remedies.

See what the experts have to say about developing a fair no-show payment policy.

Remind Patients of Charge Early, Often

You should note your office's no-show charge in the new-patient paperwork, says **Jennifer Darling**, owner of BBC Medical Management Services LLC in Dallas.

-The no-show policy can be stated in the practice brochure, which is given to the patient. This is the best way to inform patients -- in writing,- says **Catherine Brink, CMM, CPC**, president of HealthCare Resource Inc. in Spring Lake, N.J.

For instance, Brink says, you might try this script in your new-patient paperwork or brochure: -Our practice has a policy to charge a no-show fee of XXX for the second time a patient has a no-show for his appointment.-

After receiving the written notice, -patients can be reminded of the no-show fee again when you call to remind them of their appointment,- Brink says.

That way, you've already told the patient in writing and over the phone about your no-show policy, so there should be no misunderstandings if a charge is levied.

Consider Charging After the First No-Show

When a patient fails to show up for an appointment, don't charge for the no-show until someone from the office calls the patient, Darling says. -Try to find out why the patient did not come, and then ask to reschedule him. If the patient reschedules, I would not bill [for the no-show],- she says.

However, -if the patient does not reschedule or you cannot contact a patient to find the reason for the no-show, then the first offense needs to be billed,- Darling says.

Why? -If the patient begins to consistently schedule and no-show, then you have the right to discharge him as a patient after a handful of these offenses,- she says. Brink agrees, recommending that medical offices begin charging after allowing each patient one free no-show.

-The second time [a no-show] happens, you should charge,- she says -- unless there is a really good reason the patient did not call. For example, if a patient does not show for an appointment because his son was in a car crash, you should not bill for the no-show.

No-Show Fee May Vary for Different Services

Each optometry office will have to decide for itself how much it should collect from patients for no-shows. Darling proposes a no-show fee about on par with a typical co-pay amount, in the \$20 to \$40 range. -This [amount] is small

enough for the patient to pay, and large enough to compensate the physician for the time the patient took in the schedule,- she says.