

Optometry Coding & Billing Alert

Don't Blur Privacy Issues for Your Patients

Create a confusion-free NPP to avoid compliance crackdowns

Even if your optometry practice has a comprehensive, legally airtight notice of privacy practices (NPP), you're still vulnerable if you don't help your patients comprehend it fully. Let our three expert tips help you make your NPP more patient-friendly without putting you in the HHS Office of Civil Rights' spotlight.

1. Use Examples to Be Clear

Pinpoint and revise the sections where your notice might cause some confusion for your patients, says **Daniel Shepherd**, privacy officer for Singing River Hospital System in Ocean Springs, Miss.

Tip: Get your staff in on the action, says **Katherine Downing**, director of patient privacy for HCA Healthcare in Nashville, Tenn. Ask each staffer to read your notice and point out the areas that are confusing or outdated, she says.

2. Keep It Short and Sweet

If you can't whittle your privacy notice down to a couple of pages, try breaking it into two parts: a summary and a detailed explanation, says partner **Debbie Larios**, an attorney with Miller & Martin in Nashville, Tenn.

Your summary should clearly state your patients' "basic privacy rights and what disclosures you will make," Larios says. Include a disclaimer at the beginning of your summary that directs patients to your full notice, she says.

Good idea: Don't wait for your patients to request a copy of your full NPP. Instead, "post it in your waiting room, and have the patient sign a condensed version," says **Linda Boudreau**, office manager for Optometric Associates in Lewiston, Maine. Keep the summary with the patient's chart, Boudreau says.

3. Avoid Deluging With Details

You have to focus on your patients' needs, not the rule's requirements, Downing says. Ask yourself: "What do my patients need to know?" she says. Write your notice so that an eighth-grader could read and understand it, and adjust the text size for your patients' age, she says.