

Optometry Coding & Billing Alert

HIPAA Training Tips: What Your Staff Must Know About Privacy Complaints

4 Essential Tips to Prepare Your Optometry Practice's Frontline

Frontline staffers may be one of your most effective resources for handling privacy complaints within your optometry practice - if you've trained them appropriately, that is.

Your frontline employees - who often represent the first point of contact between your practice and your patients - can go a long way to help soothe irate patients ready to file a privacy complaint, says **Suzy Buckovich**, a managing consultant with IBM Business Consulting Services in Bethesda, Md. By properly training your staff on your workflow procedures and processes for handling privacy complaints, you can help "set the tone for resolution," she says.

Buckovich offers these four vital pieces of information to prime your staff to process privacy grievances:

1. **Know the Contact Person.** Covered entities must make sure that employees know who is ultimately responsible for receiving privacy complaints within their organizations, Buckovich says. "If their employee receives a complaint," she asks, "whom should they pass that along to?" Be certain that your employees know whom to call when it's time to report a privacy complaint or file one of their own.
2. **Know the Investigative Process.** Once a complaint has been submitted, employees should have an understanding of what the investigative process will look like, Buckovich says. For example, is this complaint going to be handled by the compliance officer or by someone in human resources? Don't let employees think that complaints get dumped into some bottomless pit - give them a sense of the investigative procedure so they may be better prepared to face angry patients.
3. **Know the Response Process.** Employees must know what the typical response procedure is for all received complaints. Buckovich encourages entities to inform their employees of what patients should expect in terms of follow-up communications: "How are you going to respond to the individual? Is it by letter? Is it by phone? Is it a visit?" Employees who are aware of what form these acknowledgements will take can satisfy patients who are eager to know how and when they might hear from your organization.
4. **Log It and Track It.** Employees should know that all complaints get entered into a privacy log to help you track and note trends among the types of complaints received. Remind your employees that your organization intends to take privacy complaints very seriously, Buckovich says. Therefore it's vital to have your staff's understanding and cooperation in order to process and track every individual's complaint.