

Optometry Coding & Billing Alert

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

4 ways to prepare your front line

The receptionists at your practice's front desk may be your most effective resources for handling your patients' privacy complaints - 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 toward soothing 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 processes for handling privacy complaints, you can "set the tone for resolution," she says.

Here are four things your staff should know if they're dealing with a patient who has a privacy complaint, Buckovich says:

- 1. Know the Contact Person.** Make sure that employees know who is ultimately responsible for receiving privacy complaints, Buckovich says. That way, 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.** Employees should understand what the investigative process will look like once they've submitted a complaint, Buckovich says. For example, is this complaint going to be handled by the contact person or by a compliance officer? Don't let employees think that complaints get dumped into some bottomless pit. They'll exude confidence when they have to face angry patients.
- 3. Know the Response Process.** Employees must know how your practice typically responds to complaints so they'll know what follow-up communication they can expect. "How are you going to respond to the individual?" Buckovich asks. "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 eager to know how and when they might hear from your practice.
- 4. Log It/Track It.** Employees should know that you will enter all complaints into a privacy log that helps you note trends among the types of complaints received. Remind your employees that your practice takes privacy complaints very seriously, Buckovich says.