

Optometry Coding & Billing Alert

READER QUESTIONS: Educate Staff Before E-Mailing Patients

Question: Our physician wants the office to begin using e-mail to contact our patients. Can you offer any advice on how to e-mail patients without getting the office into compliance trouble?

South Dakota Subscriber

Answer: When trying to reach their patients, many medical offices swear by e-mail as a valuable communication tool. They report that it increases efficiency, improves documentation and enhances the practice's relationships with patients.

How? E-mail takes place in real time and is stored electronically, thus allowing physicians and billers to answer messages when it is convenient for them. It also automatically documents any communication with patients --and at times, physicians will forget to document contact with patients.

However, there are also some risks to e-mailing patients. To make sure you do not violate the patient's privacy, get verbal or written informed consent to e-mail from the patient and document it in his record.

Also, make sure you do not e-mail patients about difficult or complex issues, such as an itemization of a bill or the results of a test. With these types of issues, call the patient and discuss it over the phone. If the issue is especially serious or complicated, you may want the patient to come into the office.