

Optometry Coding & Billing Alert

READER QUESTIONS: With Collections, It Pays More to Be Nice

Question: Our practice is having trouble collecting on our past-due accounts. We follow a good standard collections procedure, so I wonder if our problem is that we're not aggressive enough. Would we have better success if we acted more firm and threatening?

Oregon Subscriber

Answer: While it may seem more effective to get pushy on the phone, the truth is that aggression can hurt your collection efforts and put you at risk for harassment allegations.

Experience shows that collections efforts are simply more successful when you choose to act nicely rather than use aggressive behavior, says Jackie G., office manager at Braintree Eye Associates in Braintree, Mass.

Why bother? First of all, it's good business to keep communication lines open with patients and to remain as approachable as possible. And, you risk accusations of harassment if you're pushy and aggressive.

Be a good listener: When you call about an unpaid bill, keep in mind that people are sometimes dealing with illness, injury, or even death in the family. Never assume a patient is intentionally not paying you until you take the time to listen.

Walking a thin line: While you have to be polite and understanding, you also don't want to get strung along and walked all over. The hardest part of collections is finding the professional balance of understanding and firmness. Don't make the mistake of being so nice that people take advantage of you.

- Answers to Reader Questions and You Be the Expert provided and/or reviewed by **David Gibson, OD, FAAO**, practicing optometrist in Lubbock, Texas.