

Part B Insider (Multispecialty) Coding Alert

COMPLIANCE PERSPECTIVES: Docs' Coding Savvy Can Boost Reimbursement, Enhance Compliance

Many physicians are loathe to add coding knowledge to their repertoire, but biting the coding bullet can save you time and money - and might just keep you off the feds' radar screen.

That's what **Daniel Fick, MD**, residency director and medical director at the University of Ohio College of Medicine, learned once he became coding-savvy. "Most physicians aren't knowledgeable in a lot of the details" of coding, he admits. If they were, they could head off all sorts of problems at the pass, he says.

And physicians needn't run out and memorize the entire CPT manual, Fick assures his colleagues. Tip: Begin with the evaluation and management codes because physicians bill for E/M so frequently, he suggests, then focus on the codes for the 10 procedures you bill for most often.

Realize 4 Benefits From Coding Know-How

1. Improved communication between physicians and coders. Even physicians with the best coding staff in the business stand to save themselves confusion and headaches if they learn some coding basics on their own, Fick says.

For example, you can reduce communication breakdowns that can stem from physicians not knowing the language of coding. Many times a word means something different to a physician than it does to a coder, he says.

2. Increased reimbursement. If a physician knows how to provide the correct codes to billing staff, she increases her odds of receiving all the reimbursement she deserves, Fick says. In fact, when physicians understand coding more clearly, most realize they should be coding a level higher than they have been, says **Tray Dunaway, MD**, Camden, S.C., physician and certified compliance officer.

3. Reduced compliance risk. Not only should physicians jump on the coding train for reimbursement reasons, but an ounce of coding knowledge can save you a pound of compliance trouble. There are so many ways to get into trouble with Medicare's myriad rules and regulations that the more physicians understand about the rules the better off they'll be in the long run, Fick says.

4. Saved time. Believe it or not, it's possible to overdocument. Physicians who don't know what coders need often give them too much information. That means busy physicians are working their fingers to the bone to provide unnecessary information, says Dunaway, author of "Doctors Are From Jupiter: Compliance Is From A Galaxy Far ... Far ... Away." And to top it off, they often leave out the information the coder actually needs, he says.