

## Part B Insider (Multispecialty) Coding Alert

### Practice Management: Bring Office Manager Into The Process

When your practice brings on a new physician, your office manager should be intimately involved in the process of integrating this person into the practice, say experts.

"Generally an office manager has next to no input in bringing on a new physician," says **Alice Yingling** with **Apple A Day** in Bluffton, SC.

Usually, once the new physician is selected, it falls to the office manager to make it work. And sometimes, the office manager must clean up the minor messes "that the physicians have made without going through all the channels first," says Yingling.

It'll be the office manager's job in most practices to obtain the new physician's provider number, redo all the contracts with payors and update addresses on file. "When you bring a new physician into a practice, you've got a three month delay even in the best of circumstances before you're up to a level in accounts receivable," adds Yingling.

With a new physician joining the practice, it can be incredibly important to clarify the role of the office manager. Especially when a solo practice brings on a second doctor, the office manager's relationship to the practice will change, says **Keith Borglum**, a consultant with **Professional Management and Marketing** in Santa Rosa, CA. Particularly in cases where the office manager is the spouse of the original physician, it can create complications.

So it's important to make the chain of command explicit. "Will the new associate get to boss the office manager around? What if the office manager gets conflicting instructions from the doctors?" As soon as there's more than one doctor, you need policies and procedures and clear lines of authority, says Borglum.

For example, if a staff member comes to the new physician and complains about a problem, the new doc may tell the staff member to go home early. But, in fact, the new doctor may not have the authority to send an employee home early, and this may disrupt the smooth running of the office, notes Yingling.

It's also important to introduce the new doctor to all the employees. Often, it takes a while for a new physician to learn the names of all the office staff, Yingling notes. And it's important to introduce the doctor to the community and his or her peers, since that often leads to referrals. Often, the practice can set up luncheons, speaking engagements or a welcome party.