

Part B Insider (Multispecialty) Coding Alert

Scheduling: Patient Backlog May Be Due to Lack of Communication

Front desk, back office need to be in contact

If your waiting room is full of patients whose appointments should have started ages ago, it may not be due to an excess of demand.

Rather, running behind schedule may be due to bottlenecks in your system. "Folks don't take time to sit down and analyze the flow of information in their practices," says consultant **Jack Valancy** in Cleveland Heights, Ohio. If your practice has a recurring problem with bottlenecks, perform "a systems analysis" to track what happens when a patient walks in the door.

"What happens back at the clinical area?" Valancy asks. "How is the patient moved from the front desk to the clinical area?" Also, it's important to look at how your practice gathers the patient's information and makes it available during the visit.

"One of the big problems is that the front-desk people are out of sync with the people in the clinical area," Valancy says. And even within the clinical area, physicians, physician assistants and other staff don't communicate well enough. "They don't really pay attention to the delays that build up within the system."

If a physician walks in to see a patient, and the information isn't there, or the supplies and instruments she'll need aren't present, then it slows the visit down while the physician finds those things, Valancy says. This happens because the staff is "not anticipating the needs that are going to crop up during a particular encounter."

The patient visit isn't one big thing, it's a bunch of little things, from reception to clinical to discharge, Valancy says. "It's the little things that just build" and create delays.