

Psychiatry Coding & Reimbursement Alert

Employee Evaluations: Improve Front Office Outlook through Regular Performance Reviews

Reviews should focus on increasing performance, not tensions.

It is good practice to perform an evaluation of your front-office staff from time to time. You will not only be able to see how they are performing, it will also help in understanding how they can help you improve the standards and profits of your practice.

As patients first talk to front-office staff over the phone to fix up appointments or meet them as soon as they enter your practice, it is important that they should be cordial and experienced in handling patients and with providing a seamless link to the clinicians they want to meet. Your front-office staff should be capable of putting patients at ease so that they will have a good impression about your practice.

You need to be aware of how your front-office staff is handling the patients that come to your practice. If you perform periodic evaluations of your front-office staff, you will be able to gauge how they are handling patients and you can also know how they are safeguarding information provided by the patients.

Use these tips to help you evaluate your front-office staff and to plan these evaluations without causing any exasperation or anxiety.

Understand Which of the Employees are 'Front-Office'

According to **Deborah Walker Keegan, PhD, FACMPE**, president of Medical Practice Dimensions, Inc., in the Asheville, N.C., area, for your evaluation purposes, front-office employees typically include those involved in:

- patient access (telephone operators, schedulers, check-in/check-out staff);
- front-end billing (coders; employees performing charge capture, charge entry and time-of-service collections; financial counselors; employees who conduct insurance verification and benefits eligibility; etc.) and
- referral processing staff (such as non-clinical prior authorization staff) and supervisors/leads for these employees.

Perk up Good Relations with Regular Performance Updates

The performance review of your front-office staff should not have them worried but instead it should be a way to inspire them to beef up their capabilities and potential and help improve their performance at work.

You should not restrict your evaluation to performing it on once in a year basis. Instead, you should provide feedbacks to your front-office staff on their performance on a regular basis. If you do this, then you can avoid causing anxiety to your staff and not making them worry about what is in store for them during the performance review.

If you are providing through the year feedbacks about performance to your front-office staff, not only will you be able to go easy on them, it will also make your job easier in assessing their work. It will also give you the chance to save a lot of time going through the evaluation process thus clearing way to talk to your employees about how they can go about trying to improve upon their performance and achieve their goals.

When you're conducting the performance review, you can look at what the staff will need in terms of any training or any

other tools to help them improve on their performance at work and in achieving their objectives and patient satisfaction.

"Enlightened organizations will utilize the performance evaluation process to ask the employee: 'What can we do as an organization, or what can I do as a supervisor to help you to be your best self?'" says Keegan.

"These conversations are also an opportunity for you, as the supervisor, to get feedback from your staff," says **Kent Moore**, senior strategist for physician payment at the American Academy of Family Physicians. "What's going well? What's not? What needs to change? The answers to those questions from front-office staff can be invaluable in making your practice a better place for both patients and staff. The answers may also make you more profitable," adds Moore.

Perform Evaluations at Least Once Annually

You should make it a regular practice to conduct front-office evaluations once in a year or if possible, you can even make it a practice to have them twice.

You should begin with these evaluations right from the time a new employee is inducted into the office so that they will be aware of your practice protocols and will adopt them into their work practices. "Subsequent evaluations, either formally or informally at three months and six months can further facilitate a good first year on the job and hopefully lead to a productive, long-term relationship between the employee and the practice," Moore says.