



SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY
COMPLIANCE
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NOVEMBER 2013

Learning to Speak the Same Language: *Physician and Biller Communication*

By: Anne Garcia, Interim Director of Compliance

At times, physicians and coders seem to speak different languages. What a physician considers important information may not be what a biller needs to assign the correct code to the documentation in question. Other times, physicians may not document a piece of information that is vital to the coder. This language barrier could become even larger as ICD-10 implementation draws closer. As specificity increases, so does the need for more detailed documentation and an increased flow of communication between the practitioner and his/her biller.

Billers and physicians see the language barrier and its associated problems from different perspectives. Billers can be reluctant to interact with physicians for a variety of reasons. Billers may feel uncomfortable asking for the same information repeatedly. They may be afraid to confront the physician with concerns for fear of retribution or negative interactions with the providers. In some departments, billers may be removed from the day-to-day operations which make interactions with the physicians more difficult. Finally, at times, they may even feel they are not qualified or allowed to tell physicians what they should be documenting.

On the practitioner side, some physicians may view billers as a necessary part of the business, but not as true partners in the care of the patient. Physicians can lack the understanding of the role the biller plays in the successful operation of their daily business. The physicians can also be bothered when they receive repeated questions regarding the work they have provided for a patient. The added frustrations of the electronic health record can, at times, result in more stressful situations that may serve to increase an already strained relationship.

If a strained relationship exists between billers and

physicians it needs to come to an end and a true partnership can begin. It takes the hard work and efforts of all our team members (physicians, billers, front desk staff, administration, etc.) to make a physician practice successful. Mutual respect for each other's skills and expertise is a foundation for this working relationship. A biller has to be comfortable advising a physician on medical documentation or requesting clarification on a service that he or she performed. Likewise, a physician must be willing to accept this advice. Proper documentation leads to increased reimbursement, while incorrect or inadequate documentation will lower reimbursement and potentially raise compliance concerns. It is the responsibility of both physicians and billers to make sure that the UMG's compliance is not at risk and that the rules and regulations are communicated to all members of the practice. It is only with a functioning partnership that the practice will be successful as we strive to provide the very best care for our patients.

To further an increased partnership between our billers and physicians, a significant educational initiative is currently underway. The Compliance Department and Practice Management Operations (PMO) are hosting a mandatory all day seminar for all the billing personnel entitled "Weathering the Winds of Change: Communication, Coding and Compliance." This program will be held on December 3, 2013 and will involve presentations by members of the Compliance Department, PMO, UMG Operations, and outside consultants. The goal of the seminar is to not only improve biller/physician communication, but also to begin to prepare the billers for the upcoming transition to ICD-10. The seminar will include a lunchtime session with the billers and the Chairs of their respective departments. This seminar will be the first of many steps taken to increase productive communications between physicians and billers.

Thank you to the 82% of Faculty and Staff who have completed The **Mandatory** Annual Compliance Update. Those who have not completed the course have until December 15, 2013.

Congratulations to Orthopaedic Surgery - the first department to reach 100% completion!

Upcoming Education Dates:

Coding Clinic

Inpatient Documentation, Coding, and Charge Capture

November 21, 2013

5:00 pm

8th Floor Fitch Conference Room

SLU Hospital, Bordley Tower

General HIPAA Session

December 12, 2013

3:00 – 4:00 pm

Learning Resource Center

Room 113



Weathering the Winds of Change: Strategies for Communication, Coding and Compliance

For billing staff – by invitation only

December 3, 2013

7:45am to 4pm

12:15pm -1:15 pm Chairman Luncheon

Busch Student Center

Room 172