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*Editors Note: The long awaited summer is in full swing as we head into Cherry Festival. Some of you use this week to vacation and escape to the Upper Peninsula in search of peace and quiet. Many enjoy the variety of entertainment down at the Open Space. I enjoy watching all the commotion from the water. Whatever your preference, enjoy this wonderful weather because winter is sooo long!! As always, we welcome your comments and suggestions. Please email them to [Support@corerecovery.biz](mailto:Support@corerecovery.biz).*

## **Cross Training: A Way to Increase Upfront Collections? Motivate employees to ask the right questions**

A common complaint made by billers/collectors is that not enough collection information is gathered at the point of registration. This leads to billing and collection problems down the road. What can be done to correct the problem?

What about cross training all registration personnel in collections? If registration personnel have never collected before, you can be sure that they do not understand how important it is to get the proper information from patients. A commonly heard observation made by newly cross trained employees is, "I never understood how important that information was until I had to collect it."

Knowledge is power. The more information the registration folks have about what happens on the back end, the better. Often when the new registration employees are trained, the person doing the training has not been properly trained and it has a trickle-down effect.

The trainer may not be aware of the significance of seemingly small things, such as asking for a particular contact person when calling a particular payer, when it is crucial to collection efforts. If the registration staff see the difficulties encountered by collectors firsthand when correct information is not obtained, it increases their desire to get that information. If they know how important a particular bit of information is, they will want to do the right thing in trying to get it completed.

### **A Vital Link**

Admitting and registration functions are such a vital link to the collection process that many hospitals have placed this responsibility under the direction of the patient accounts manager. This allows the organization to deal with the process of production and the collection of bills at the time the first contact is made with the patients. It is clearly identified that patients are more cooperative in financial matter at the time of preadmission or admission. This level of cooperation declines during the patient's stay in the hospital until a point, some 30 days after discharge, when patients can become obstinate.

At that point, collectors are competing with collectors from credit card agencies, mortgage lenders, and others. Regardless of where the registration process fits into the organization chart, there are a few steps within this function that should be in place to help you maximize collection efforts.

### **How the Other Half Lives**

When you begin to cross train employees from these two departments, they will get a little taste of the other employee's world. However, it isn't enough to simply let the employees observe one another. They need to step into the other person's shoes for a while to know how the other half lives. One good way to help admitting employees handle upfront collections is to role-play, or act out the

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the role of the patient and the registrar. Develop a script with possible questions and responses. For example, an employee may tell a patient, “Your deductible is \$100. How would you like to pay for that today?” If the patient responds with, “I don’t have my checkbook with me,” the registrar may reply, “We accept major credit cards.”

### **Training Leads to Increased Collections**

There are three opportunities to collect cash. They are:

1. Preadmission;
2. Registration; and
3. Discharge.

Because the preadmission process provides the opportunity to talk with patients and ask for copays and deductibles, it is a perfect situation for cross training. This process, if properly done, can allow for the verification of all third-party insurance coverage and the presentation of estimated costs the patient will have to pay. This time should also be used to start planning for and collecting self-pay amounts and co pays.

During the registration process, the opportunity still presents itself to provide thorough communication with patients on all financial matters and obtain complete information on all third party claims. Your ability to collect any estimated money due, however, becomes less effective.

At the time of discharge, the opportunity exists to allow financial counselors to exercise their responsibility for seeing that the hospital gets paid.

The key to successful collection lies within all of these registration steps. It is communication with patients—explaining the patient’s role and his or her financial responsibility for the hospital visit. Communication provides an opportunity to obtain verifiable insurance information and an opportunity to precollect for services to be rendered.

A byproduct of the process is improved public relations, because patients will not be surprised when they find out what they owe. These steps require training and proper education, but will lead to added financial gains and favorable patient relations.

### **Pros and Cons**

Often, an “us versus them” attitude can exist between departments, especially if the registration area is not supervised by Patient Financial Services and particularly between billing and registration. Each department’s staff believes the other department is not getting or giving enough information of patient information sheets.

If insurers are coded and billed incorrectly, it creates extra work for everyone involved. The solution is allowing staff members, such as billers and registrars, to “swap” positions for a day so that they can see what the other person’s job entails.

First, ask admitting staffers to spend time with a biller/collector. The biller explains the billing systems, how the edits work and why claims are rejected. Then, ask the bills to sit with admitting staff during the registration process. The result is that the departments will have more respect for each other and will understand the frustration that can occur on the job. Admitting staff can see how difficult it can be to work with people who don’t want to be asked a lot of questions—and who are not used to being asked to pay in advance. The entire process helps departments cooperate on a more personal level. Make this training an ongoing occurrence. Team building and cross training in the business office can work and work well of done appropriately. Office culture and willingness to work together means a lot.

## **Total Bankruptcy Filings Increase Nearly 35 Percent Over First Quarter 2008**

*Both consumer and business bankruptcy filings increased dramatically during the first quarter of 2009 over last year.*

The total number of U.S. bankruptcies filed during the first three months of 2009 increased 34.5 percent over the same period in 2008, according to data released by the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts on June 9, 2009. As total filings reached 330,477 for the first quarter, the total surpassed the 245,695 new cases filed over the same period in 2008. The total filings in the 2009 first quarter also represent a 9.7 percent increase from the 301,317 bankruptcies filed during the fourth quarter of 2008.

Business filings for first quarter totaled 14,319, representing a 64.3 percent increase over the first quarter 2008 total of 8,713. The first quarter filings represented an 11 percent increase over the fourth quarter 2008 total of 12,901.

Consumer filings also increased during the first quarter of 2009. The total number of filings increased 33.4 percent to 316,158, from the 2008 first quarter total of 236,982. They also represent a 9.6 percent increase from the fourth quarter of 2008, which recorded a total of 288,416 non-business filings.

The percentage of consumers filing for Chapter 13 protection fell slightly, from 35.6 percent during the first quarter of 2008 to 29.2 percent over the same period in 2009. The number of consumers filing for Chapter 7 protection increased to 70.8 percent during the first three months of 2009, the largest percentage of consumer Chapter 7 filers since the implementation of Bankruptcy Abuse Prevention and Consumer Protection Act (BAPCPA) in 2005.

Tennessee, Nevada and Alabama were the states with the highest per capita filing rate for the 12-month period ending March 31,

2009. Georgia, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Kentucky, Arkansas and Illinois round out the top 10.

Chapter 7 of the Bankruptcy Code is available to both individual and business debtors. Its purpose is to achieve a fair distribution to creditors of the debtor's available non-exempt property. Unsecured debts not reaffirmed are discharged.

Chapter 13 of the Bankruptcy Code is available for an individual with regular income whose debts do not exceed specific amounts; it is typically used to budget some of the debtor's future earnings under a plan through which unsecured creditors are paid in whole or in part.

For more information, visit the American Bankruptcy Institutes Web site.





## Number of U.S. Adults Reporting Disabilities is Increasing

*The number of U.S. adults reporting a disability increased by 3.4 million between 1999 and 2005, according to a recent report released by the Center of Disease Control and Prevention.*

*The study published in the May 1, 2009 edition of the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report finds an estimated 1 in 5 U.S. adults (47.5 million, or 21.8 percent) report a disability. The three most common disabilities among adults in the U.S. are caused by arthritis or rheumatism, back or spine problems and heart disease.*

*“It is likely we will see more dramatic increased in the number of adults with a disability as the baby boomer population begins to enter higher risk, older age groups over the next 20 years,” said Chad Helmick, M.D., CDC medical epidemiologist and coauthor of the study,*

*The data, which was collected from the U.S. Census Bureau’s Survey of Income and Program Participation, found women (24.4 percent) have a higher prevalence for disability compared to men (19.9 percent) at all ages 45-64 and 51.8 percent for ages 65 or older.*

**Source:** “Cross Training: A Way to Increase Upfront Collections?”, *Health Care Collector*, January, 2003.

“Total Bankruptcy Filings Increase Nearly 35 Percent Over first Quarter 2008, *ACA International Web Site*, June, 2009

“Number of U.S. Adults Reporting Disabilities is Increasing”, *Pulse*, July 2009.

**Disclaimer:** This information is not presented to be used as legal or professional advice on specific matters. Readers with specific questions should refer them to their own attorneys for guidance.