To Charge or Not to Charge

By Melissa Young, MD [2]

The physician in me sometimes conflicts with the business owner in me. I’m curious to know what other small practices do.

With today’s economy and the size of some patients’ copays, sometimes I feel bad about collecting their copays. I know, I know, it’s a business. And it is the contract with the insurance companies. And for visits, I think patients definitely should pay what is deemed the “patient responsibility.” But there are times we ask patients to come in for other things; things that do not entail a face-to-face with a physician.

Say, for example, if a patient needs to come in for an injection. He sees the MA for a minute or two. We generally submit a claim to the insurance company. Some pay. On the other hand, if the allowable charge is $24 and the patient’s co-pay is $30, they don’t. I would have no qualms about a $10 charge, but for someone who needs weekly injections, I fee uneasy about asking for $30 or even $50.

So, I wonder, do other docs just not charge at all for non-physician visits? My billing manager (a.k.a. husband) thinks I should charge and that we should collect in full. Having never had to deal with such things during my previous eight years of practice, I don’t know what to do. I know we never charged patients up front for administration of medications if it was not done within a visit. But as an employed physician, I have no idea what happened after that. Patients never complained to me about getting a bill, but maybe that’s because they called the billing department. Since my current billing department lives with me, I hear about every complaint.

The physician in me, you know, the one who went into medicine to save the world, doesn’t like having “the money talk” with patients. But the business owner in me, you know, the one who has invested time, money, and anxiety into building her own practice, knows that sometimes it happens, especially when there is no office manager. I’m curious to know what other small practices do. Learn more about Melissa Young and our other contributing bloggers here.

Disclosures:

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