

KNOW YOUR EMPLOYEE BENEFITS



Benefit and insurance issues important to you—brought to you by the insurance specialists at Cook, Hall & Hyde, Inc.

How to Read Your Medical Bill

Comparing medical bills can save you money

Medical bills are becoming increasingly complex and difficult to read. And charges from clinics and hospitals tend to be lumped together instead of itemized – making it very difficult to see exactly what you are paying for. With many medical facilities moving toward a paperless office, many patients are not even receiving the statements regarding the amount the insurer paid. This is resulting in a much greater chance of you being overcharged.

Controlling Costs

A big step in controlling your health costs is knowing how to read your medical bill. Because many medical bills contain billing errors as well as items that are priced much higher than their cost, reviewing your bills with a careful eye can end up saving you a lot of money.

How it Works

When you receive your medical bills there are three documents that you need to compare to help you understand if you are being billed only for the services you received:

- A list of services performed – this document is given to you when you leave the doctor's office or health facility.
- The bill from the doctor or health facility – this is a list of services performed with

the charges associated with each service (which should match the list of services performed document given to you when you leave the facility). Many health systems are no longer issuing itemized bills, which will help you find obvious errors much easier. You have the right to request an itemized bill from the facility.

- Explanation of benefits (EOB) (explaining how much of the bill paid for by insurance) from your insurance provider, Medicare or other payer.

Start by reading over each of the documents individually and noting any charges that you don't understand or don't think you should have been charged for.

Because these bills use codes for each of the services provided, it can make it even more difficult for you to read. To better understand what these codes mean, use a medical dictionary or encyclopedia (www.medilexicon.com). Then compare the documents against each other, making sure that the charges match up.

Checking for Errors

Make sure there are no data entry errors including numbers with an accidental zero added on (i.e., "10" instead of "1" X-ray). Also

check for duplicate listings of procedures and medications that you do not think were administered.

If you find suspicious charges, don't hesitate to contact the clinic or health care facility billing department.

A Proactive Approach

There are also a few best practices that you can utilize before your procedure or appointment.

- Make a log and write down notes as you are administered treatment, noting exactly what services are performed. Consider bringing a friend or family member to do this for you if you will be unconscious.
- If you're going to be charged for a hospital stay, call the billing department before your procedure to ask if there are any supplies you can bring with you to avoid high charges such as a box of tissues, extra blankets or pajamas.

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