

## Billing Education Article By Dr. Rhonda Church

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### WHY AUDIT?

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Let's face it; no physician wants to be audited. Having MSI auditors arrive to inspect your practice is as much fun as root canals, six months of one-in-one call on an ice floe in Antarctica or port-a-potty clean-up after a prune-eating contest. With approximately \$700 million spent annually in Nova Scotia on physician services, most automatically paid on the honour system, it's imperative robust processes exist to ensure claims submitted to MSI are correct.

During the three years I have worked as Medical Consultant on MSI's audit team, many physicians have told me that having an audit was an important learning experience both for themselves and their staff.

While much of the auditor's role is to ensure accountability of Nova Scotians' tax dollars, we also protect the vast majority of physicians billing with honesty and integrity. This month, I'd like to share a small sample of the situations we've uncovered where significant overbilling was found that we've stopped.

- A call from the public identified visits were claimed when a physician was out-of-province.
- Our analysis showed health service code 62.0 was billed incorrectly. This code is for resection of a liver cyst or abscess and pays in the vicinity of \$500.00. It was being used for very brief and minor procedures in another part of the body by non-general surgeons.
- We identified hundreds of institutional visits being billed per day, sometimes twice weekly by a physician. A review of the chart notes did not support medical care being provided.
- Our analysis has uncovered several physicians billing impossibly high hours in time-based and other services i.e., work that would require up to 30 to 40 hours per day. In addition, services were billed simultaneously in two different locations. Claiming for services that couldn't possibly be conducted during an extremely busy day is an emerging issue in other provinces as well.

Having your practice audited is a stressful experience, even when no significant issues are found. The audit process is a mechanism that provides important accountability and an opportunity to identify and stop inappropriate billing practices.

**Rhonda Church, MD,  
Medical Consultant, MSI Programs, Medavie Blue Cross**

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