

Billing Education Article By Dr. Rhonda Church

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Ah, memories. My first experiences on hospital wards were back in the '80s. As a clinical clerk, my first rotation was gyne, located then on the 4th floor of the Centennial Building at the Victoria General.

Back then, the concept of same-day admission for surgery was as futuristic as the concept of the World Wide Web. Patients slated for surgery were admitted late the day before and it was our job as clerks to do the admission history and physical, draw blood, and wheel the ECG cart into the room to do the pre-op ECG on anyone over 40.

I remember my panic at being told I needed to do my first ECG. However, I managed to locate a description in one of the coil-bound books in my lab coat pockets. With that in hand, and some oversight from an intern from the class ahead of me, I found the anatomical landmarks and managed an acceptable tracing.

Recently, I was back on the wards doing a locum for a colleague. It was an incredibly busy couple of weeks and it was hard not to marvel at how the multi-disciplinary team at the Bridgewater hospital has come together. If my patient needs an IV, the RN starts it. The pharmacist calculates creatinine clearances and reviews microbiology reports and sits down with me to discuss optimal medications and doses. When lab work is ordered, a technologist appears and an ECG tech arrives when I ask for an ECG. The expanded scope of other groups helps to free us up to provide the aspects of our patients' care for which we are best suited.

At MSI, we regularly field questions from physicians and billing clerks about how to bill for services provided by other health-care workers. I've covered it in a previous column but thought it was worth revisiting, given the ongoing questions we've heard.

The situations in which physicians may bill for services provided by other health-care providers is actually quite limited. Here's a synopsis:

Personal participation

If you're a family physician who directly employs a nurse (RN, LPN or NP) you may bill visit codes (section 7 of the Preamble) only if you have personally participated in the visit and met visit requirements such as conducting a patient assessment. The chart note must reflect this. Saying a brief hello would not, for example, meet Preamble visit requirements.

On the premises

If you're a family physician who directly employs a nurse, you may claim for some procedures your nurse carries out, provided you are on the premises. These include paps, immunizations and injections.

Counseling/complex care

If you're a family physician employing a nurse, you can't claim for counseling/psychotherapy or complex care codes done by the nurse. Preamble rules for the former require you personally spend at least 80 per cent of the time directly with the patient, and the latter requires you personally spend at least 15 minutes with the patient. Unless these requirements have been met, the service can't be billed to MSI.

Scope of practice

If the nurse or other health-care provider isn't your employee (i.e. he/she is paid by a district health authority, the IWK or another employer), you can't bill for visits or procedures he/she has provided. In many

instances, this would amount to the service being paid twice. As scope of practices of our nursing and other colleagues have expanded, many such as starting IVs and administering medications are taught and supervised by nursing or other non-physician staff as part of their scope of practice. Medical staffs are rarely involved in directly supervising these procedures anymore.

Medical trainees

Physicians may claim for services provided by medical trainees (i.e. medical students and residents) under some circumstances. There's a detailed description of these circumstances in Preamble section 8.1.2. Physicians may claim for services provided by students and residents if they are physically on the premises and may claim only for his/her services or the resident's, but not both.

As always, MSI welcomes your billing questions. We can be reached at
MSI_Assessment@medavie.bluecross.ca

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