

Introduction to Patient Access Services

Patient Access Orientation Training Manual

National Association of Healthcare Access Management

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National Association of Healthcare Access Management

PREFACE

Dear Patient Access Services Managers and Staff Development Instructors:

The National Association of Healthcare Access Managers (NAHAM) has developed this resource for Healthcare Access Associates – your front-end staff. The information in this useful guide reviews a variety of topics essential in the orientation and development of front-end staff. It also can aid in the preparation of staff for the NAHAM Certified Healthcare Access Associate (CHAA) Examination.

This manual includes a course outline that may assist with course layout and preparation time. There is also a brief quiz at the end of each section. An orientation checklist is included near the end of the manual. You may want to modify this checklist to meet your needs during the orientation of new employees.

Since this manual is distributed nationwide to large and small facilities and it is used in both the inpatient and outpatient arenas, some content is intended to be general in order to provide you the opportunity to stress areas of particular importance to you as a manager or instructor and to add information specific to your healthcare organization or work location.

Being the national organization representing your interests and needs, NAHAM desires to support your efforts to developing and retaining quality staff. Your comments and suggestions regarding this training manual or any other issues are appreciated.

Sincerely,

NAHAM Education Committee

ABOUT NAHAM

The National Association of Healthcare Access Management (NAHAM) is the only national professional organization dedicated to promoting excellence in the management of Patient Access Services in all areas of the healthcare delivery system. Patient access services professionals provide quality services in registration and all of its support processes to patients, providers and payers into, through and out of their health care experience.

NAHAM members have responsibilities for a wide spectrum of patient access services such as, but not limited to, the following: Admissions, Registration, Financial Counseling, POS collections, Verification of benefits, Pre-certification, Physician Relations, Guest Relations, Information, Telecommunications, Scheduling, and other related areas, such as Case Management. Members may have evolving and specialized roles due to nursing and other training.

Members work in: Hospitals, including those dedicated to clinical specialties such as psychiatric, rehabilitation, children, women, and others, Nursing Homes, HMOs/PPOs, Freestanding Surgery Centers, Call Centers, Ambulatory Care Centers, Physician offices, Clinics, and Home Health Agencies.

Established in 1974, the Association serves as a central source of technical information on changes and trends in healthcare that affect admitting/registration processes and patient access functions.

With its national office in Washington, DC, NAHAM serves the national interests of its members by advocating progressive changes in admitting/registration procedures nationwide.

NAHAM is *the* source for valuable education and support on issues impacting Patient Access Services.

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SECTION ONE

Revenue Cycle Basics

A basic understanding of the Revenue Cycle provides the Patient Access staff with the knowledge of the critical role they play in optimizing financial performance within their organization.

Health care revenue cycle management consists of processes and methodologies that organizations put in place to ensure accurate and timely billing and payment of claims.

Key employees from multiple departments are responsible for these processes. Those staff members include representation from Scheduling, Registration, Ancillary Services, Case Management, Health Information Management and Patient Accounts.

The patient's first contact is usually a scheduling or registration employee.

Best practices within the Patient Access Department, in addition to ensuring the integrity of registration data collected, include insurance and benefit verification, acquisition of referrals and pre-certifications for elective procedures, medical necessity validation and collection of patient financial liability.

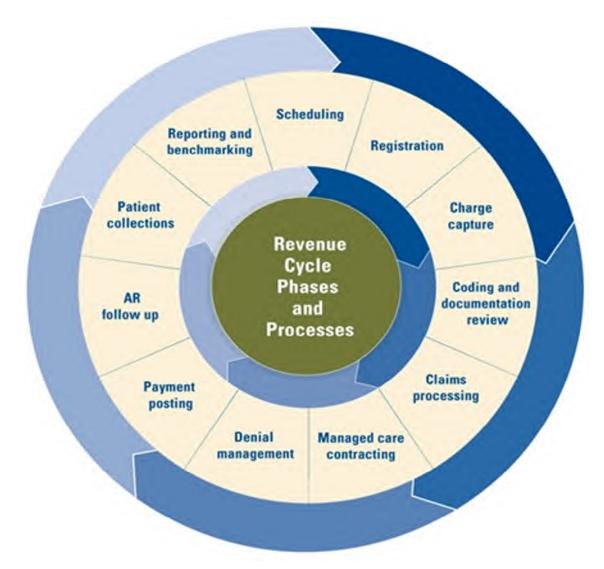
Likewise, the previously mentioned departments are responsible for charge capture, clinical documentation, complete and accurate coding. Ideally, this completed financially secured account is ready to be billed by a team within the Patient Accounts Department. Typically, health care facilities hold bills for a period of four days prior to submission for payment and expect payment from insurers within 45 days.

A number of key processes affect revenue and cash and result in rejected claims or denials from payers. They include incomplete insurance information, non-covered services and failure to identify medically unnecessary services, late charges, coding delays and discrepancies and untimely billing.

One of the most preventable reasons for claim rejections that delay collection of accounts receivable is inadequate and incorrect information gathered at the time of registration. During each interview, the Patient Access staff member should validate and update demographic and insurance information ensuring a clean claim can be generated by the Patient Accounting Department. Rejected claims extend the time in which payment is received and require re-work within the accounting department.

Health care revenue cycle management involves many strategies, including procedures that hospitals and clinics use to improve cash collections and meet goals. These strategies also include customer receivables valuation, underpayment recovery policies and transactions involving federal government programs such as Medicare and Medicaid.

The Revenue Cycle



The Revenue Cycle includes all the events that occur from the time a patient enters our healthcare system to the time their bill is paid or otherwise resolved.

With Patient Access at the beginning of the cycle, all other services depend on accurate and complete information from patient identification to entering insurance information to identifying financial needs.

SECTION ONE

Quiz

- 1. Patient Access is at the ______ of the revenue cycle.
 - a. beginning
 - b. middle
 - c. end
- 2. Health care revenue cycle management consists of processes and methodologies that organizations put in place to ensure accurate and timely billing and payment of claims.

True False

3. Other departments depend on the Patient Access Department for complete and accurate data.

True False

- 4. All of the following could be responsible for insurance denials *except*:
 - a. inaccurate insurance date
 - b. incorrect patient identification
 - c. non-covered services
 - d. identification of medically unnecessary tests in advance
- 5. One of the most preventable reasons for claims rejection that delays collection of accounts receivables is:
 - a. wait times
 - b. incorrect information gathered at the time of registration
 - c. failing to address a patients special needs at point of registration

SECTION TWO

Patient Access Services Overview

Patient Access Services Department

Patient Access Services in a hospital setting encompasses many different roles and responsibilities. It is one of the most important and concentrated areas in health care.

It has been estimated that access staff is responsible for 80 cents of every dollar that comes into the facility. They are responsible for the delivery of the critical components of the revenue cycle, as well as keeping the hospital compliant with the many regulatory agencies, maintaining patient safety through correct patient identification practices and responsible for providing extraordinary customer service skills in situations that are often difficult.

The Patient Access Services model varies from facility to facility. Facility size influences how each Patient Access Services model and job roles are set up. In a large institution a Patient Access Service associate may be responsible for one type of patient registration or service in one particular area, while in a smaller facility, the Patient Access Service associate may be responsible for several areas and responsibilities. As an example, a 700 bed hospital may have registrars in the ED that only registers patients into the ED department, while in a rural 15 bed facility; the registrar may register ED patients, outpatients, in-patients and be responsible for bed placement and may serve as the hospital's PBX operator.

According to NAHAM, Patient Access general responsibilities include:

- Customer Service
- Positive Identification of the patient
- Provide Information to the patient/family
- Help determine special needs of a patient
- Pre-admission services
- Scheduling of resources and services
- Pre-certification of insurance
- Determine the correct level of care
- Distribute and/or obtain signatures on required documents:
- Rights, Notice of Privacy, Important Messages from Medicare, etc.
- Infection Control
- Collection of accurate and complete patient information
- Point of Service collections

Some of the departments within Patient Access Services include

Registration: In-patient, Out-patient, ED, Surgery areas, clinic

- Pre-Registration
- Scheduling
- Insurance Verification and Pre-Certification/Referrals
- Information Desk functions
- Operator Services(PBX)
- Financial Counseling
- Patient Accommodations or Bed Control
- Pre-Service Clearance
- MPI (Master Person Index) search database services

The Patient Access Services departments have a critical role in the overall success of a hospital. Most of the services performed in Patient Access are at the beginning of the Revenue Cycle.

The Revenue Cycle is a continuous process, beginning when a patient is identified as requiring or requesting medical services and ending at the time payment is received and the account is closed.

By obtaining accurate information at the point of registration, such as patient demographics and insurance or payment information, the services provided have a better chance of getting paid in a timely manner and without penalties, which positively affects the overall cash flow and revenue of the hospital. Incorrect registrations are a major financial burden on any facility, especially when employees must allocate time to work denials, re-bill, credit balances, refunds, and reconcile incorrect reimbursement.

In a perfect world, the patient presents for service, their insurance company has already approved their service and has agreed to pay for it, the registrar collects accurate information and signatures, the service is performed, charges are entered correctly, the HIM department correctly codes the diagnosis and procedures, the bill is generated and sent to the provider and without any delays, payment is made. This is called a "clean claim." Many departments and Associates are involved in this process.

There are a lot of possible obstacles along the way. With Patient Access being the first contact and being at the beginning of the revenue cycle, these obstacles may not only delay or prevent reimbursement but can also cause compliance and patient safety issues.

There are some challenges that face Patient Access personnel such as:

- The patient may not be coherent to answer any questions; therefore the registrar may have to rely on family or friends for information or previous information
- The patient may not have their insurance information available or the patient may not be representing themselves truthfully.

Patient Access Services Overview

Basic Job Roles

Patient Access Associates have to wear many different hats at any given moment. They must be proficient in a multitude of areas, since everything a Patient Access Service Associate does effects patients, families, other Associates, and the viability of the organization. Any one mistake may cause a patient safety issue, a legal issue, a customer service issue or a revenue issue. A Patient Access associate must take every function seriously and provide service with 100% accuracy.

Basics include:

- Being proficient on the hospital registration and ancillary computer systems. A registrar may have to know upwards of 9-15 different systems to perform their job functions. They need to know how to register the patient, how to verify their insurance, how to check eligibility, how to check medical necessity, how to scan and retrieve documents in the imaging system, how to take payments and print receipts, etc.
- Knowing which rules, forms and questions must be enforced to make sure the facility remains compliant with government agencies and regulations.

Examples are:

Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)
Emergency Medical Treatment and Active Labor Act (EMTALA)
Consent for Treatment (General Consent)
Patient Rights and Responsibilities
Medicare Important Message
Notice of Privacy Practices
Medicare Secondary Payer Questionnaire (MSPQ)

And there may be many others:

- Know insurance basics such as recognizing commercial and government plans, knowing how to prioritize multiple plans and when to obtain a referral, authorization or waiver.
- Be able to give continual excellent customer service in adverse situations. Healthcare customer service skills must include empathy and compassion.
- Understanding and knowing how to discuss financial information and obligations and know how and when to refer to others for help.
- ❖ Be able to provide consistent excellent customer service in a variety of situations.

Here are just a couple of everyday scenarios in the life of a Patient Access Representative.

Scenario A:

Upon arrival, the patient is identified and a patient record is compiled. This is most often performed by the registrar but can also be the RN or triage. A medical record number and registration or encounter number is created as it is needed for all other services to be ordered, charged and documented. Working with the patient's family when possible, the registrar must:

- Obtain correct demographic and emergency contact information.
- Note the reason they are here and whether or not it was due to an accident, and if so, determine the responsible party or guarantor.
- Obtain the patient's insurance or payment information.
- Accurately load the insurance plan, the networks, the mailing address and phone numbers, the identification numbers, the subscriber of the policy along with their SSN, DOB, address and employer for every policy the patient carries.
- If there are multiple insurance policies, know how to prioritize these policies for payment.
- Determine what the ED co-pay may be so they can collect it after the patient has been seen by the physician.
- Input the correct attending, admitting and family physician.
- ❖ Obtain signatures for treatment and the release of information form.
- Give the patient their Patient Rights form and their Notice of Patient Privacy information.

How would this change if the patient was unconscious?

Scenario B:

The patient presents to the registrar's desk to register for an add-on CT scan. The patient has lung cancer and this test will determine whether or not the cancer has spread to the brain which would account for the patient's recent loss of vision and headaches. The patient has been at this facility recently so much of their demographic and insurance information is available from a previous visit which makes the registration piece fairly easy. However, the physician failed to sign the order for the CT scan, which means a new one must be obtained before the patient can have the service. The test wasn't ordered STAT and the patient's insurance plan requires an authorization for today's CT scan. Since it wasn't obtained in advance the registrar must present the patient a statement of financial liability (waiver) inform the patient that they will be financially responsible for the \$2000 procedure today. The patient begins to cry because they don't have the money. They haven't worked due to their illness for 5 months. Now what?

Scenario C:

A physician schedules 84 year old Mrs. Smith for a procedure she can't pronounce. She doesn't drive much since her husband passed away last year and she has several concerns:

- How to get there?
- What time is her appointment?
- Where should she park?
- Does she need to bring her insurance cards?
- Will she need money?

The registrar in the pre-registration department calls Mrs. Smith to get all of her paperwork prepared in advance of her appointment. She confirms Mrs. Smith's appointment time, gives her detailed information on where to park and what to expect once she arrives. Mrs. Smith is no longer anxious and feels confident about her upcoming visit to the hospital.

In most situations the registrar is one of the first people that a patient or family member comes in contact with at the hospital. Whether it's on the phone scheduling them or discussing their upcoming visit, registering them for their service, escorting them to a bed, department or to their family member, Patient Access Associates are responsible for setting the tone for the patient's visit. A Patient Access Associate must possess extraordinary customer service skills. We will discuss this in more detail in the Customer Service section of the book.

PATIENT ACCESS SERVICES FUNCTIONS

Scope of Responsibility

The Patient Access Associate provides quality services in registration, scheduling and all of its support processes to patients, providers and payers throughout the patient's healthcare experience. The associate is responsible for timely, accurate and courteous registration of each patient prior to the delivery of care. The Patient Access Department provides services to supply the foundation for medical records, billing & collections.

Components of Registration

Positive Identification of the Patient

Prior to the onset of registration, the Patient Access Associate should utilize their facilities search criteria to determine the presence of an existing medical record number (MRN). Typically the search options consist of numeric, phonetic or a combination of both data. To ensure the patient's identity a government issued photo identification such as driver's license, military ID or passport should be requested and scanned into your facility's document imaging system. Consistent with 'The Joint Commission' safety goal, two identifiers must be utilized to ensure positive identification of patients prior to the delivery of care.

The primary identifiers would include:

- Correct spelling of names
- Use of legal names
- Date of Birth
- Social Security Number
- Previous names e.g. maiden or married

Secondary identifiers include:

- Address
- Gender
- Telephone number

Selecting a wrong patient can lead to many issues regarding treatment and payment but the most critical issue is that of patient safety.

Every patient should have only one record. This "medical record" should be the repository for all patient documentation while at the hospital. Included in the medical record is their physician orders, test results, documentation of service, forms etc.

Failure to use proper search techniques may lead to a Duplicate Medical Record Number (one patient with 2 or more records). Duplicate records are a patient safety issue and considered a significant registration error.

The Health Information Management (HIM) department is responsible for maintaining each patient's medical record and Master Patient Index, or MPI.

Patient Access is typically responsible for the creation of the medical record number (MRN) for patients who are new to the organization/provider. They must also locate a patient's previous number for each visit so that today's information can be combined with all other medical information kept on that patient.

Ethnicity

Data collection during patient interviews is a critical component of Patient Access. In addition to validating demographic and insurance information other mandated fields are captured during patient registration.

Many states require hospitals to collect and report data on race, ethnicity and language. This data provided a better understanding of the community they serve; helps gain information to match their workforce in communities they serve; is used for grant applications; to target quality of care initiatives; and for contractual compliance obligations with government contracts especially Medicare and Medicaid. Additionally it provides data to determine patient risks for developing certain diseases or conditions based on risk factors for a particular ethnic or race.

The Patient Access professional should approach the topic of race and ethnicity with sensitivity. Inform the patient why the data is being collected by using the following scripting.

'We are required by law to collect information regarding race and ethnicity of our patients. Of the following choices, what best describes your ethnicity?'

'Hispanic or Latino origin or Non-Hispanic or Latino'

'Of the following choices, what defines your race?'

- American Indian/Alaskan Native
- ❖ Asian
- Black/African-American
- Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander
- ❖ White

References: US Census Bureau- Statistical Standards: Defining Race and Ethnicity

Ethnicity is based on the following categorization:

<u>Hispanic or Latino:</u> A person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race. The term "Spanish origin" can be used in addition to "Hispanic or Latino."

Race is based in the following five categorizations:

- American Indian or Alaska Native: A person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America), and who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment.
- Asian: A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent, including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam.
- Black or African American: A person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa. Terms such as "Haitian" or "Negro" can be used in addition to "Black or African American."
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander: A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands.
- White: A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa.

Conducting the Interview

The Patient Access Associate creates the initial record that serves as the foundation of the patient's medical record. The data collected is utilized by multiple members of the healthcare team to include Patient Accounts, Patient Information, Clinicians and Health Information Management. A complete interview must be conducted with the patient or responsible party to ensure the most current and accurate data is on file. The collection of demographic and insurance information along with other required registration fields must be validated and updated each time a patient is registered.

While each organization has a computer system for the collection of information required on each patient, following is a list of data commonly collected:

- Patients Address and Phone Numbers
- Patients Date of Birth
- Patient's Social Security Number
- Patients Primary Language
- Patients Employer Information
- Ethnicity/Race
- Emergency Contact Information
- Religion and Church Affiliation
- Entering the patient's reason for their visit via accident codes (auto, work, etc.)
- Guarantor and Subscriber Information
- Insurance Information
- Medicare Secondary Payer Questionnaire
- Attending, Primary and Referring Physician

In addition, other entries required by a facility may include:

- Email address
- Previous Names
- Advance Directives
- Allergies
- Communicable Disease

An Access Associate should utilize solid interview techniques by 'questioning' the patient and avoiding 'read back' validation practices.

Interview Tips

ASK!

Solicit information from the patient. Have you ever been a patient here before?

- What is your address
- What is your marital status?

May I list your religion or do you have a specific church affiliation you would like me to add to your record?

Do not engage in 'Read Back' interview techniques.

Don't read information from registration screens and ask the patient if it is correct.

- High risk for identity theft
- Potential disclosure of PHI
- Too many inaccuracies
- Returned mail
- Rejected claims

Collection of Insurance Information

A registrar is responsible for the input of the patients insurance or payment information. A registrar must be able to recognize the many different types of insurance plans as well as input the correct numbers, addresses and phone numbers. You'll read more about insurance in section three. Types of insurance might include:

Government Plans

- Medicare
- Medicare Advantage
- Medicaid
- Tricare/Champus
- State Child Health Plan
- Indian Health Services

Commercial Plans

- Anthem
- ❖ Blue Cross
- United Healthcare
- Cigna
- Aetna
- And many more

Self-Pay or Liability

- Discount programs
- Charity
- Auto Insurance

A registrar also may need to know which plans their facility and physician's contract with because non-contracted insurance plans may require statements of financial responsibility (waivers) or may need to have the patient re-directed to their home hospital for treatment

They also need to know if certain insurance carriers required authorizations for services prior to treatment.

Subscriber Data Collection

The subscriber refers to the person whose employment makes him or her eligible for group health insurance benefits. When interviewing the patient, it is important to ask who the insurance policyholder is in order to determine the subscriber. This information is documented within the registration 'subscriber information' pathway of the insurance data fields. Inclusive is documentation to indicate how the patient is related to the subscriber.

Guidelines for Determining Policyholder

The policyholder (or subscriber) is the person who contracts with the insurance company for healthcare coverage. The policyholder may or may not be the person whose name appears on the card. To determine the policyholder, use the following guidelines:

- For most Blue Cross, Commercial, and PPO (Preferred Provider Organization) insurance, the policyholder is the person whose name appears on the insurance card.
- Most HMOs (Health Maintenance Organization) give each insured person his or her own card. In this instance the person on the card may be the patient, but the patient may not be the policyholder. You will need to ask who the policyholder is on the insurance.
- For most HMOs the policyholder can be identified by a two-digit suffix of 01. Spouses are usually identified by a suffix of 02, and dependents with 03, 04 and so forth.
- For Tricare (formerly known as Champus/Champva) insurance the policyholder will be the sponsor or the person who is active or retired from the military.
- For Medicare, Medicaid, and Workers Compensation, the policyholder will ALWAYS be the patient.

Guarantor Data Collection

The guarantor is the person or entity who is financially responsible for payment on a patient's account. Usually the patient is financially responsible for medical charges. A parent or legal guardian/trustee is the guarantor for patient's under 18 years of age. This is also the case for patients with a decreased mental capacity. In the circumstance that the patient is legally emancipated, then the patient is the guarantor.

The guarantor listed on the registration is the person that will receive all notifications referencing a claim to include the insurance EOB's and billing statements.

Point of Service Collections

Many hospitals require Patient Access Associates to collect co-pays and deductibles at the time of service. This will require the registrar to have knowledge of pricing or pricing software as well as money management skills.

Many patients appreciate knowing in advance of service what their portion of the bill will be. This gives them time to prepare or to work out arrangements for payment.

Registrars who either collect or discuss payments with patients must be knowledgeable about out of pocket expenses.

Out of Pocket Maximum

The total payments toward eligible expenses that a covered person funds for him/herself and/or dependents. These expenses may include deductibles, co-pays, and coinsurance as defined by the contract. Once this limit is reached, benefits may increase to 100% for health services received during the rest of that calendar or policy year. Deductibles may or may not be included in out-of-pocket limits.

Deductible

The amount of eligible expenses a covered person must pay each year from his/her own pocket before the plan will begin to pay for eligible benefits.

Co-payment

Co-payment is a payment that must be made by a covered person at the time of service. Services that require co-pay, and the predetermined amount payable for each service, are specified in the policy. Co-payments may be required for physician visits.

Calculating Patient Liability

Steps to Calculate Patient Liability - Managed Care

MANA	AGED CARE	-
Step	Process Description	Formula
1	Estimated TOTAL CHARGES based on resources provided by facility. Total charges are needed /F the insurance contract reimburses based on charges	(A)
2	Determine CONTRACTUAL DISCOUNT for type of service provided	(Per Contract) (B)
	- Percent of charges	
	- Per diem	
	- DRG	
	- Fixed Rate or Case Rate	
3	Calculate TOTAL CONTRACT FAYMENT AMOUNT by subtracting contractual discount from total charges or enter the CONTRACT PAYMENT AMOUNT for the DRG, Per diem, Fixed Rate, etc.	(A-B) or (B) for fixed payment amount (C)
4	Determine unmet DEDUCTIBLE amount based on insurance verification	(D)
5	Calculate TOTAL CONTRACT FAYMENT DUE LESS DEDUCTIBLE	(C-D) (E)
6	Determine patient COINSURANCE RATE based on insurance verification	(F)
7	Calculate patient's COINSURANCE AMOUNT	(E x F) (G)
8	Calculate TOTAL PATIENT LIABILITY cannot exceed remaining OOP maximum	(D + G) / (H)
9	Calculate TOTAL INSURANCE PAYMENT	(E x (100-F)) (I)
10	VERIFY ACCURACY	(H+I) = C

Note - the TOTAL PATIENT LIABILITY cannot exceed the patient's maximum out of pocket amount

EXAN	NPLE # 1:		
Total	Charges \$400		
	atient's insurance has a contract with your facility that reimburses based on a percentage off of the tol 25% contractual discount.	al charges. The contrac	allows
Insur	ance Verification indicates \$100 unmet deductible and 10% coinsurance. Maximum OOP = \$1,500 no	t including the deductible	
Step	Process Description		
1	TOTAL CHARGES		400.00
2	CONTRACTUAL DISCOUNT	(400 x 25%)	100.00
3	CONTRACT RATE	(400 - 100)	300.00
5	TOTAL CONTRACT PAYMENT DUE LESS DEDUCTIBLE	(300 - 100)	200.00
7	COINSURANCE AMOUNT	(200 x 10%)	20.00
8	TOTAL PATIENT LIABILITY (Deductible + Co-insurance) cannot exceed OOP maximum	(100 + 20)	120.00
9	TOTAL INSURANCE PAYMENT	(200 x 90%)	180_00
10	VERIFY ACCURACY (Patient Liability + Insurance Payment = Total Contract Rate)	(120 + 180)	300.00

Note - the TOTAL PATIENT LIABILITY does not exceed the patient's maximum out of pocket amount. The patient owes an estimated amount of \$120.00 for this visit.