Maximize patient collections using the web

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With the addition of electronic health record (EHR) systems and patient portals, many medical practices today are better positioned to incorporate modern processes and procedures with which to manage their accounts receivables more effectively, particularly by improving collections from patients.

In addition to using the EHR or patient portal, practices can find stand-alone services that can facilitate patient payments via the Internet or telephone.

We have found with our clients that practices incorporating these payment options have been able to reduce their outstanding accounts receivable.

The reason for this is simple: Accessing financial information and paying bills online is now commonplace, and in many respects an expectation of the customer—in this case, your patient.

Since there are many ways to establish an online payment system, there is not much value in discussing the particulars of any one system, but rather focusing on how to effectively convince your patients to engage with the online process. In order to do this, specific protocols to communicate with each patient must be established when your staff has the opportunity to do so face-to-face.

We find that many practices have not updated their financial policies and processes to communicate with patients regarding the availability and benefits of online payment options. Instead, the financial policy is often several years out of date and are from the time when options for payment were in person or through the mail.

We recommend that practices use the following strategy to help achieve patient compliance with payment policies.

Establish a point person

Identify a specific individual or team in your practice who will be responsible for communicating with your patients about your practice’s financial policies.

This may be employees at the front desk or in the billing department, or in a larger practice perhaps even a specific person whose jobs consists solely of discussing financial arrangements with patients.

If this task is not assigned to anyone specifically, it becomes no one’s responsibility. The financial policy simply becomes another page or two given to patients when they arrive, posted on the wall and on your practices’s website.

Given the amount of money at stake with high-deductible insurance coverage, a few minutes of face-to-face communication with each patient regarding how the practice handles the portion of charges that is the patient’s responsibility will go a long way.

Discuss with patients

The discussion with each patient regarding the practice’s financial policies and procedures need not be lengthy. It is a good idea to determine in advance the realistic amount of time staff will be able to spend with each patient.

By doing so, the conversation can focus on the most important aspects of what each patient needs to know.
For example, if there is only time to spend a minute or so with each patient, the goal is twofold:

- highlight the most important information by circling or highlighting specific items in the policy, and
- develop rapport between your staff member and the patient. If the patient indicates a preference for making payments online, focusing on the method for doing so should be a priority.