

Tips for Responding to Record Requests

By Jaime Mulligan, ACA Legal Manager; Susan McClelland, ACA Medicare Advisor; and Ritch Miller, DC, ACA Medicare Committee Chairman

You have received a letter from your insurance or Medicare carrier requesting to review your records. What do you do next?

- **Pretend YOU are the reviewer.** Pretend you know nothing about your office and have a stack of claims to get through. Are you more likely to approve a claim that is easily readable and quick to look at and understand, or one that requires an hour of your time to decipher?
- **Make sure you read the letter carefully and include everything it requests.** If it is asking for a certain date(s) of service (DOS), send in the notes for that DOS and all related information—including the most recent exam, history, treatment plan and any diagnostic findings. All these items help a reviewer place the pertinent DOS in a larger context.
- **Consider attaching a brief note/cover letter, if the details of the patient’s history are spread out over several years.** For example, you could explain that you have seen the patient off and on for “x” years, so the history has been updated over time—then provide a brief summary of when and what has changed with the patient. *Note: Such a cover letter is not a substitute for the actual documentation, but it will make the reviewer's job easier and help you overall.*
- **Make sure your notes can be read and understood by someone other than you or your office staff.** If you think someone else might have trouble reading your documentation, submit a transcribed copy along with the original documentation. If you use different colored ink for documentation, and it is necessary for accurate interpretation, make color copies. If you use non-standard abbreviations, include a legend with your records. Also, check your copies and make sure nothing has been cut off the edges/margins. If your record is larger than the standard 8½ x 11 inches, make copies the same size as your official record, if necessary for clarity.
- **As much as possible, try to work with the contractor and willingly provide further documentation and answer questions.** Remember, third-party payers have a right to ensure their money is being spent appropriately, and asking for your documentation is one way to do so. This can be a beneficial experience for all parties if everyone takes away something positive.

Ways to Make Sure Your House Is in Order Now

- **Make sure your documentation is “up to snuff.”** Purchase a copy of the ACA’s *Clinical Documentation Manual*—now discounted to \$39.95 (call (800) 368-3083 to order). Make sure you include details when documenting examinations, histories, treatment plans and diagnostic findings. Consider checking your documentation for readability and completeness.
- **Make corrections/additions where necessary.** Review your records and see if they pass the test. If you discover shortcomings, **do not change any current records.**

Instead, note any additions and/or corrections with the current date (and be sure to sign/initial them). Keep a “memo for record” that you conducted an internal review and found these outlined problems. This shows good faith and due diligence on your part as a practitioner.

- **Don't panic.** Spend some time upfront and you can avoid headaches further down the road. As noted educator, scientist and peace activist David Starr Jordan said, “Wisdom is knowing what to do next; virtue is doing it.”