THE OFFICE

Accounts Receivable: Standardized Strategy

Management of accounts receivable is a significant issue in all private offices, and I've addressed it from multiple angles in previous columns.

In most cases, the patient-owed portion can be kept out of the accounts receivable in the first place. Collect as much as possible at the time of service, even if you have to offer a discount for immediate payment. When immediate payment is impossible, or you must wait for the insurance explanation of benefits, ask for a credit card number that you can keep on file and charge as soon as you know the balance due.

JOSEPH S. EASTERN, M.D.

Sending statements should be a last resort, but they should be sent promptly, and no more than three times before you refer the account for collection.

Most difficult or awkward collection problems can be categorized, and you should have a standardized strategy for dealing with each of them. Those strategies should be assembled as a formal written policy and applied consistently each time they arise. Such a policy begins by considering possible scenarios.

Standardize as many situations as possible; for example, make a list of any situation in which you always want the patient balance written off, or always want the balance sent to a collection agency without your direction, or always want to make a case-by-case decision.

Be as specific as possible. What do you want done, for example, when a patient is deceased? Do you want to bill the family or estate, or write off the balance as a bad debt, or some combination of the two? My office has a "sliding scale" based on the size of the balance due, ranging from writing off the smallest balances to deciding the fate of the largest on a case-by-case basis. The occasional very large balance might merit referral to a specialized company for a probate search, or other identification of accessible funds.

What about a patient who claims to have been laid off from work and does not pay a balance or discontinues payments? Options include referring the account to your collection agency, writing off the balance, or negotiating payment of a reduced balance.

If a patient has no insurance and requests a discount at, or prior to, the time of service, decide if you want to give one, and if so, how much and under which circumstances. My basic no-insurance discount is 40% if payment is made at the time of the visit. Those who can't pay immediately are offered 25% off if they pay within 30 days of service, 10% if within 60 days. Cases of particular hardship are worked out on an individual basis. We have a similar policy for patients who have insurance that my office does not accept.

For inpatient services, when the hospital has discounted or written off the patient balance and the patient requests a discount, we match the discount granted by the hospital. For small balances that remain unpaid after reasonable efforts have been made to collect from the patient, we

Continued on following page

CLASSIFIEDS

www.familypracticenews.com

PROFESSIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

NHS/RURAL HEALTH - Central Michigan based National Health Service (NHS) Approved Rural Health Clinic seeks family physician for outpatient based position. Work alongside 2 nurse practitioners in an established practice and take over for a recently departed family doc. Option for medical directorship position as well. Part time physicians considered.
Competitive salary, production incentive and comprehensive benefits.
Close to 2 universities and gorgeous resort lake communities.
Contact Nancy Agee at 800-678-7858 x64455; nagee@cejkasearch.com or visit www.cejkasearch.com ID#136062FN.

METRO IOWA OCCUPATIONAL MEDICINE

Hospital employed well established Occupational Medicine position with dedicated sales and marketing director joining three providers in dynamic Iowa metro of 750,000 population associated with a 663 bed health system. No inpatient or call. $160-200K salary,bonus and benefits($250-270K income). DONOHUE AND ASSOCIATES 800-831-5475 F: 314-984-8246 E/m: donohueandassoc@aol.com

Moving?

Look to Classified Notices for practices available in your area.

PRACTICE WHERE YOU PLAY!

Millennium MedSearch represents clients in **California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Arizona, Nevada, Texas, Oklahoma, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia as well as Ohio and Michigan**....offering desirable locations in each state, including metro and coastal areas.....mainly outpatient and some traditional practices.

For the latest opportunity listings Contact Ginger Sattler at 1-800-765-7015 or email: recruit@millenniummedsearch.com

Over 20 years of success in the healthcare industry and member of NAPR

Georgia- Duluth

Seeking urgent care physician for full-time evening position available in urgent care division of a suburban Atlanta emergency department. Independent contractor status with stable practice group. Urgent care experience preferred.

For more information contact:
Nellie Awbrey
Gwinnett Emergency Specialist
678-312-3317,
Fax CV : 678-312-4416
Email CV: neawbrey@bellsouth.net

MAINE

St. Mary's Regional Medical Center, a 233-bed Acute Care Hospital, has openings for BE/BC Family Medicine Physicians in a variety of practice settings. As an employed physician you will receive a competitive salary, generous signing bonus, medical student loan repayment assistance, a full benefit package, and relocation assistance along with an attractive practice call schedule. You and your family can enjoy a lifestyle full of cultural, academic and recreational activities in a place where values, community and collegiality actually have meaning.

Please send CV to Debra McKinley, Physician Recruiter, St. Mary's Regional Medical Center, 100 Campus Avenue, Lewiston, ME 04240. Telephone: 800-862-1766 E-Mail dmckinley@stmarysmaine.com

Stuttering and Your Child: questions and answers
For a 64-page book, send $1.00 for postage and handling to:
1-800-992-9392
STUTTERING FOUNDATION OF AMERICA

BEST READERSHIP, QUALIFIED LEADS
2010 CLASSIFIEDS

Family Practice News Rates
4 Column Classified Ads
From 1" to 12"
Sizes from 1/48th of a page to a full page

For Deadlines and More Information
Contact: Karon Hunley
Tel: 812-212-0061 or
Email ad to: karon@run-ads.com

Family Practice News
Elsevier-Family Practice News
360 Park Avenue South
New York, NY 10010
ELSEVIER

Disclaimer

FAMILY PRACTICE NEWS assumes the statements made in classified advertisements are accurate, but cannot investigate the statements and assumes no responsibility or liability concerning their content. The Publisher reserves the right to decline, withdraw, or edit advertisements. Every effort will be made to avoid mistakes, but responsibility cannot be accepted for clerical or printer errors.

Continued from previous page

write off balances of less than $25.00 and refer the rest for collection.

Delinquent accounts, after collection efforts have been exhausted without success, are usually unsalvageable; but, occasionally, patients will attempt to negotiate a settlement, once they realize the damage done to their credit rating. I am less generous with discounts under such circumstances, of course, but I usually take 5% off if the balance is paid in full within 10 days, and 10% if paid by credit card immediately, by phone. We require them to complete a standard "hardship form" to apply for a larger discount.

Nobody collects every balance owed. This is the reality in any business, especially a medical one. The main objective is to do everything possible to minimize uncollected accounts. Develop a system that works, and be disciplined about implementing it. ■

DR. EASTERN *practices dermatology and dermatologic surgery in Belleville, N.J. To respond to this column, e-mail Dr. Eastern at our editorial offices at fpnews@elsevier.com.*

INDEX OF ADVERTISERS

Bayer HealthCare LLC	
Aspirin	51
Eisai Inc. and Pfizer Inc.	
Aricept	41-43
Forest Laboratories, Inc.	
Savella	15-18
Bystolic	27-30
Lexapro	45-49
Namenda	68a-68b
HealthForceOntario	
Recruitment	32
Lilly USA, LLC	
Corporate	7
Humalog	52-54
Cymbalta	60-66
Merck & Co., Inc.	
Dulera	8a-8b, 9
Ortho-McNeil-Janssen Pharmaceuticals, Inc.	
Nucynta	38a-38d, 39
Pfizer Consumer Healthcare	
Children's Advil	71
Pfizer Inc.	
Lipitor	3-4
Pristiq	75-76
sanofi-aventis U.S. LLC	
Lantus SoloSTAR	20-24, 33-38
Somaxon Pharmaceuticals, Inc.	
Silenor	10-12
Union Swiss	
Bio-Oil	57