

Saving Time: A Physician's Perspective

Save to myBoK

by Robert Pezzulich, MD, FACS

Thanks to the benefits technology brings to quality healthcare and operational efficiency, most healthcare organizations are finding themselves progressing deeper into the electronic environment. Besides the obvious technological challenges, this evolution involves the human factor, including the question of how to integrate technological advances into the lives of busy physicians and HIM professionals alike.

This article will explore how HIM professionals and physicians can work together to ease the pains of new technology and a busy work life and, above all, save valuable time.

Making Time

In a physician's life, as in the life of an HIM professional, what is the one commodity that is scarcest? Time. What are both parties looking to obtain from electronic information systems? Efficient use of their time.

Physicians want systems approaches that will allow them to use their scarce time to its greatest effect. In our organization, we have a question that allows us to address a multitude of decisions regarding patient care: "What is best for the patient?" HIM professionals, when faced with a decision regarding systems, should ask that very same question followed by a second question: "Will this change allow physicians to use their time more efficiently and more effectively?"

Determining Dictation

One way in which HIM professionals can help physicians make the most of their time, and in turn make more effective use of their own time, is by maintaining physicians' entry into the system via a dictation route, which has proven more efficient than other methods.

It has also proven helpful to give doctors a choice of how HIM documents are created. Let physicians use hand-held devices or pick up the nearest telephone. Give them the choice of dictating in the hospital, from their office, or from their homes. Physicians like to know that they can speak into a device that will produce the written word.

It is also helpful to give physicians the option of reviewing or editing their dictation on paper or electronically as well as the ability to use digital signatures. If your organization is like ours, the physicians differ in age and training. Many have come from the world of paper records, while others have considerable computer skills and are accustomed to an electronic health record. Their skill sets, experiences, and desires differ. It is important for both physicians and HIM professionals to be flexible in meeting these varied needs.

However, the one thing all physicians have in common is the desire for rapid turnaround. The primary purpose of the medical record is communication—to other practitioners on the healthcare team, to coders and HIM professionals, and even the author of the dictation, who may need to review his or her last H&P exam or operative note.

Keep it Simple

There are other ways that HIM professionals and physicians can work together to make life more efficient. Use templates designed or at least approved by physicians. Populate the various sections with language decided on or approved by physicians, which saves them time by allowing them to only make the necessary changes. This will ensure that physicians are providing all the required information necessary for communication, for their proper charging, and for your organization to properly code its own charges.

In addition, HIM professionals should ask physicians to use a standard set of abbreviations in both dictation and written medical record entries and physicians should honor this request. There should also be a list of prohibited abbreviations that physicians are not allowed to use. Wherever possible, use other and previous records to pre-fill required sections. This could be as simple as using ADT data or as complex as populating new dictation from older dictation.

HIM professionals and physicians both have a role to play in making healthcare processes run more smoothly and effectively. For best results, keep it short and simple. By keeping this in mind, HIM professionals can allow physicians to work more effectively and more efficiently, and physicians, in turn, can help HIM professionals improve the quality of their work. That gives both the rarest of commodities—time.

Robert A. Pezzulich (rap1@phin.org) is a practicing general surgeon and chief of staff at Southwestern Vermont Health Care in Bennington, VT.

Article citation:

Pezzulich, Robert A. "Saving Time: a Physician's Perspective." *Journal of AHIMA* 74, no.7 (July/August 2003): 62-63.

Driving the Power of Knowledge

Copyright 2022 by The American Health Information Management Association. All Rights Reserved.