

Five Tips for Complying with Third-Party Payers

As healthcare professionals, we strive to provide high quality care and the best possible outcomes for every patient. And when we're not working with patients, we're constantly trying to stay up-to-date on the issues impacting the business side of running a practice.

From understanding treatment codes to staying current with the constantly changing Medicare regulations, physical therapists are often forced to balance patient care with time-consuming administrative tasks.

Complying with third-party requirements can be challenging and frustrating. Here are a few tips to help:

“Inaccurate coding can increase your risk for an audit.”

- 1.** Become familiar with treatment codes. Over the last 18 years, CPT codes have changed to better reflect what physical therapists are actually doing to help patients. CPT codes are assigned to every task physical therapists and other health professionals provide patients. There are 48 CPT codes that fall under physical medicine and rehabilitation services. Coding and billing guidelines are provided on the American Physical Therapy Association website. Private and public insurers are less likely to pay for services you provide that are not coded correctly, so to ensure reimbursement taking the time now to understand CPT codes will pay off in the long run.
- 2.** Get to know Medicare and other third-party payer compliance requirements. If you follow the Medicare requirements you are likely to comply with many of the other third party payers.
- 3.** Make sure your documentation is accurate and thorough. To comply, you must follow the requirements defined by the third-party payer. Be sure to review the timed codes and how you report and record your time. Inconsistencies in this area can help raise a red flag. Possibly increasing your odds of getting an audit. For more information on general physical therapy documentation requirements, check out the American Physical Therapy Association website.

“Accurate coding can help improve reimbursement rates and reduce your risk of audit.”

4. Invest in an electronics records management compliance software program. A number of software packages are available to help physical therapists comply with third-party insurance requirements. Many will provide flags to remind you to look for gaps and issues that you to have in order to comply with the third-party payer requirements. Software programs also provide software guided clinical decision support protocols, automated documentation of therapist-patient interactions, evidence-based practice guidelines, and documentation, billing, and regulatory compliance assistance.
5. Ask for help. Practice Management Consultants are available to help guide you through reimbursement, billing and compliance challenges. The rules and regulations defined by third party payers take your time away from caring for patients. Despite your best efforts, you may not be coding items as accurately as you think. Accurate coding can help improve reimbursement rates and reduce your risk of audit. Consultants can also help you develop a plan to improve your reimbursement rates and payment outcomes.
 - Working with an expert on the rules and regulations around coding, billing, documentation, and compliance can free you up to spend more time treating patients.
 - *Want more information? Learn more about the topic in a podcast with Helene Fearon, PT and partner of Fearon and Levine Consulting. She recently shared her third-party payment expertise with PT Talker. Tune in at www.PTTalker.com.*



About the Author

After helping design and market the first preventative knee brace for football players as an Athletic Trainer at Iowa State University in the late 1970's, Jeff has made physical therapy equipment his passion since 1986. He launched Advantage Medical in 1994 with a commitment to help Physical Therapists and rehab professionals improve clinical outcomes as well as save time and costs through pioneering, creative solutions. Jeff's entrepreneurial approach keeps Advantage Medical and its clients at the forefront of innovations and best practices in the PT industry.

Jeff was also one of four original founders of the National Medical Alliance in 1988 which later changed its name to Motion1. He served as the Chief Operating Officer for 10 years and was instrumental in its growth and reputation as a leading supplier to independent rehabilitation distributors across the country. He is also the host of the long running podcast "PT Talker" featuring a physical therapy expert for listeners every week. Subscribe to the free, informative broadcast designed to help therapists grow their business at www.PTTalker.com

About Advantage Medical

Advantage Medical was established in 1994 to meet the growing needs of rehab professionals in a variety of medical disciplines. Advantage Medical has become a leading provider of expert advice as well as quality therapy equipment and supplies, offering innovative solutions to challenges faced by physical therapists, clinic directors, chiropractors, athlete trainers and other medical professionals.

In October of 2010, Advantage Medical joined the family of Scrip Companies of Bolingbrook, IL as an operating division. Now with access to a wider variety of products and large scale purchasing power, Advantage Medical is poised to raise the level of value we bring to our clients. Scrip Companies serves markets in massage therapy, chiropractic, spa and now physical therapy.

About PT Talker

Stay up-to-date on the latest industry trends and news by connecting with a community of your fellow experts. Advantage Medical's PT Talker is the online resource for business news and ideas for physical therapists. Our podcasts, blog and newsletters keep you informed with new ways to help grow your business, save time, provide improved clinical outcomes or lower costs. Review updates on the newest equipment and products, find tips and techniques for improved patient outcomes, and hear from other clinics about their best business practices. You'll find everything you need to stay ahead of the curve in physical therapy at PTTalker.com.

