

## SA-VIT COLLECTION AGENCY TIPS OF THE MONTH ARCHIVES



April 2010

### MISSED APPOINTMENT FEES

Charging a fee for a missed appointment sounds like a reasonable approach, especially if the provider has to set aside a specific amount of time for the appointment, and that time cannot be filled by another patient. Even if you do not incur any loss because of a missed appointment, you can still charge a fee. However, since the loss is minimal, we suggest you negotiate with the patient to avoid a recurrence by forgiving the first fee. That should be the last time you forgive a fee for a missed appointment for that patient.

If you wish to charge for missed appointments, you should create a written policy. The amount of the fee should be fixed (for example, \$50.00), and the patient or guarantor should consent in writing to pay the fee. This policy should be included in your patient information packet completed by the patient at the first visit, and periodically thereafter. If the situation warrants, and you will not see the patient prior to the visit, we suggest you mail the agreement to the patient, and not schedule the appointment until you have the signed agreement.

In certain cases, such as when time is set aside for surgery or a lengthy consult, you may even want to collect the missed appointment fee in advance. You can call it a non-refundable deposit. If the appointment is not kept, you have the payment. If the appointment is kept, you can credit the pre-paid fee to the current visit.

In most cases, if you bill a patient for a missed appointment, we suggest you do not reschedule that patient until that particular fee is paid. If instead you choose to see the patient without collecting the fee, then you should write off the missed appointment fee at that time. There is no reason for your office to have multiple missed appointment fees on a patient's account.

From our point of view, a missed appointment fee is one of the most difficult charges to collect, often virtually impossible. They are almost always disputed. Credit bureaus do not want us to list missed appointment fees. If a case is litigated, missed appointment fees often must be deleted from the account. It is best to avoid the problem altogether.