

SA-VIT COLLECTION AGENCY TIPS OF THE MONTH ARCHIVES



May 2007

"I don't give out my Social Security number."

Because of the threat of identity theft, some patients are refusing to give doctors their Social Security numbers as part of their patient information.

Since this number has many uses in a medical practice it is essential to have it on file, for insurance purposes, for identification when two or more patients have the same or similar names and for collection efforts especially when it becomes necessary to trace them to new addresses, sue delinquent payers or list them with credit bureaus.

The reception staff needs to reassure these patients that there is no risk of their information falling into the hands of identity thieves, and that providing the Social Security number is necessary for their medical care. Here are three ways to both reassure the patients and still provide the practice with the information needed.

First, use the federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) as a tool to reassure patients that under the law they are protected against anyone in the practice revealing any Protected Health Information, which includes both their health and all personal information, to anyone not allowed to receive this data.

Second, explain benefits to the patients. In many instances insurance companies require the Social Security number for positive identification when paying its portion of the cost of treatment. Without it, the patients may become responsible for the full payment of the charges. In an emergency situation when another physician, hospital, or emergency room need the patient's record, the social security number allows positive identification when transferring doctors' notes about treatment or medication.

Third, if the patients still refuse to comply, it is time to refer them to the supervisor who has the authority to deny seeing the patient until the information is forthcoming.