

Getting Paid for Extra Paperwork

Are you often asked to fill out health reports for young patients who need them to attend day care programs or summer camp? What about parents who call and request vaccination reports or medical records for their college-bound children? Like other busy practices, your practice may simply handle these types of requests as they arise and regard them as just another paperwork chore that comes with the territory. However, as physicians are being asked to fill out increasingly detailed paperwork for their younger patients, it's not unreasonable to ask to be compensated for the work.

The difficulty, of course, is finding an optimum way to charge for completing forms that compensates your practice for the extra work, yet won't alienate patients. Here are two potential approaches.

Charge per Form

Charging parents or guardians a specific dollar amount for any medical form they want completed relating to their dependent child is an approach that's been adopted by many practices. Other practices use a rising scale flat fee that depends on the complexity of the form and the time and effort it takes to fill it out. It's advisable to spell out this policy in any welcome materials you give new patients and on signs in your waiting room. A typical fee range is \$5 to \$20 or more per requested form.

Impose a Flat, Annual Fee

Some practices impose a mandatory annual charge based on the number of patients under the provider's care in the family. Families who pay the charge can have an unlimited number of medical forms completed during the year.

Review Pros and Cons

Before imposing any type of additional fee for paperwork or medical forms relating to a patient's dependent child, your practice should evaluate possible objections parents or guardians may raise. Moreover, you'll have to decide related issues such as the amount of the fee, whether you'll put a cap on the annual fee, or whether you'll charge Medicaid patients a fee. Be aware also that states may impose limits on how much physicians can charge patients for copies of their medical records.