

Risk Tip: Use of Scribes

A scribe serves as the real-time transcriptionist for the healthcare provider, observing and recording the provider's conduct and actions, detailing the patient interaction, and helping to navigate and search for critical data in the electronic record. The scribe is not permitted to act independently but instead documents the provider's dictation and/or activities during the visit.

With the scribe serving as the documenter and transcriptionist, the provider is able to spend more time in direct face-to-face conversation and interaction with the patient. The presence of the scribe means the computer is no longer a barrier between clinician and patient.

To successfully integrate scribes into your medical practice, the following practice tips are recommended:

- When introducing the role of scribe for the first time in your practice, be sure to achieve full support from all members of your team: providers, NPPs, and all ancillary and office staff. A fully functioning and trusting team is essential for patient satisfaction, physician engagement, and enhanced productivity.
- Have a written job description for the scribe to use as a benchmark for performance reviews and guide process improvement.
- Utilize scribes in accordance with medical staff rules, hospital bylaws, and the organization's documentation, medical record, coding and billing policies. • Follow the MAC guidelines for your jurisdiction of practice.
- Always remember that while the scribe's documentation may be more voluminous than the physician's, the physician remains ultimately responsible and accountable for the content of the note. The physician must review the documentation for accuracy and completeness and sign off on it at the conclusion of the patient visit.
- Scribes should be well-trained at the outset when they join your practice, but will still need ongoing training, support and education throughout their career. They should be well versed in office and hospital policies and practices, including HIPAA, HITECH and be cognizant of the basic rules and requirements for proper documentation, coding, and billing.
- It is advisable to carefully audit the scribe's documentation and practices. Be sure that notes are being properly authenticated and that orders are not acted upon without prior authentication. Take action to reinforce practice expectations, offer additional training and mentorship, and facilitate the seamless integration and support for the scribe in practice.

The demands on a physician's time often seem endless. Introducing a medical scribe into the practice setting can provide real benefits, to patients, practitioners and staff. When managed carefully the provider/scribe collaboration can be quite satisfying and rewarding.