

The pocket-sized billing department

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When it comes to recording office charges, a PDA can be your billing department's best friend.

There was a time when preparing bills was an ordeal for Ron Kline, MD, a Las Vegas pediatric oncologist. It was bad enough having to quickly scrawl out—in his office or sometimes in the corridor outside a patient's room—the name of the patient he had just seen, the date of the visit, the procedures he had carried out, and the codes required for billing. But there were days when, readying the information for his practice's business department, he had to struggle to read the notes he had written to himself. And from time to time, that stack of index cards, which was the heart and soul of his billing records, was nowhere to be found.

According to *For the Record*, a magazine for health care professionals, several studies have shown “that a majority of caregivers undercharge or miss revenue opportunities—as much as 40%–50% of all service charges—for various reasons, including forgotten documentation, lost or overlooked encounter forms, and faulty memory when too much time has passed between encounter and documentation.”

Now when Dr. Kline needs to record all those crucial bits and pieces of information that eventually become a bill, he just whips out his handy personal digital assistant (PDA) and fires up PocketBilling, the software program he uses for tracking his billings.

Going smoothly

If he has seen a patient before, Dr. Kline, who is affiliated with the Comprehensive Cancer Centers of Nevada, accesses that person's records, already stored in his Treo 700w PDA. If he has

just consulted on a new patient, some quick tapping on the Treo's screen creates a new record. In either case, Dr. Kline quickly notes the hospital where he is seeing the patient, the E&M charges, as well as the relevant CPT code for a just-finished procedure.

The process, says Dr. Kline, goes particularly smoothly because he has been able to adapt PocketBilling to minimize the amount of keying he has to do: “I have customized my menu of procedures and their billing codes and the list of hospitals where I see patients.”

PocketBilling truly earns its keep at billing time. It is then that Dr. Kline can hand the folks in the back office clearly printed, precise records. “Our billing people love it because they don't get scraps of paper,” he says. “What they get is always in the same format.”

The \$189 PocketBilling program is available at www.pocketmed.com (as is a free trial version) and can be run on PocketPCs as well as Palm-based devices. But it certainly isn't the only program out there. Type *PDA billing software*—or some similar term—into an online search engine and you'll get scores of hits on programs that purport to help you bill correctly. Among some of the more interesting programs I found were:

MDCoder (www.mobiledesigntech.com, \$299 set-up fee, \$100 monthly subscription fee) for PocketPC and Palm. The program offers keyword code search, a searchable ICD-9 index of 350,000 keywords. Included are categorized and cross-referenced CPT and ICD-9 codes. One of MDCoder's main attractions is that you can send—wirelessly or through a PC—billing information to [mobiledesigntech's](http://mobiledesigntech.com) online database from wherever you are. Once

the data are online, your back office can retrieve your records and create the appropriate bills. A 14-day trial, based on your patients, is available.

PocketPractitioner (www.pocketinformatics.com, \$75 and \$149). Palm only. A trial version is available. As the prices indicate, there are two versions of PocketPractitioner available: Professional and Office. Both versions allow patient tracking, include diagnoses lists, allow billing charge capture, and include a wide assortment of billing codes. However, the \$149 Office includes a complete desktop Windows-compatible application, as well as a more extensive list of CPT and ICD-9-CM codes licensed from the American Medical Association.

EveryCharge (www.MDeverywhere.com). Although EveryCharge allows for the recording of charges, diagnoses, and procedures on a handheld, it can't be considered a freestanding PDA program. Yes, it works off a PDA, but it is really an appendage of a Web-based billing service provided by MDeverywhere. Information recorded on your PDA is transmitted to MDeverywhere. There, it is checked for errors and problems before it is submitted by MDeverywhere itself for payment. EveryCharge is available only to practices with about 40 or more physicians. Cost is negotiable.

STAT ICD-9 Coder (www.stat-code.com, \$29) Palm only. This vendor strongly urges that the trial version be downloaded first “to ensure that the software meets your needs.” Program includes 15,000+ ICD-9-CM diagnosis codes and is categorized by disease classification.