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Practice Compliance 2020 and Covid-19

In our daily routine, it is easy to get completely absorbed in the pursuit of new patients and the care of current patients. These are the two realities that can consume our complete attention because they are so important to fulfilling our calling and keeping our businesses healthy. They are consuming because they are fun (or at least, they should be), and they are imperative to staying in practice.

However, there are legal responsibilities in our practices, also. An important part of staying on top of the legal responsibilities lies in the intricate concept of compliance.

Each of our offices is specifically responsible to stay compliant with all of the rules, regulations and laws promulgated by the state in which we practice, and by each insurance company with which we participate. These rules are complex, they are potentially bewildering, and it is critical to understand and follow them if we are to continue to practice legally. Failure to do so leaves our offices susceptible to audit, lawsuit, and other legal recourse. Breach of the rules and laws can result in social consequences, lost reputation, fines, loss of license, and even jail sentences.

To avoid such legal consequences, each of our offices is expected to know, and train all of our staff on, the protocols and practices that keep the practice compliant.

Since following the vast array of rules is so complex, an important part of that compliance is to develop and maintain a **Compliance Folder**. This folder is a compilation of the staff policies that can (and should) be reviewed to remind team members how we run our offices, and why we run them the way we do.

A typical compliance folder should include chapters such as:

- Office mission statement
- Identity and duties of the office's compliance officer
- Staff policies
  - Expectations, rules, job descriptions, sexual harassment, enforcement and consequences, etc.
- HIPPA
- E-communications and encryption standards
- Protocols for patient records

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- Identity theft policy
- Exam and X-ray systems
- Billing
  - Cash
  - Insurance
- Collections
- Insurance relations
- Patient flow
- Patient care
- Paperwork – samples and uses
- Record keeping and destruction protocols
- Security and access protocols
- Fraud and waste standards
- Emergency event protocols

And if that were not complicated enough, now we must include a chapter covering our Covid-19 response and compliance.

This can be a fairly brief chapter that covers office protocols for:

- Educating staff on Covid-19 issues
- Screening staff for active Covid signs
- Provision of PPE for staff
- Expectations for masks and gloves
- Provision of hand cleansing (sanitizer or soap)
- Screening incoming patients for Covid symptoms
- Advising them to see M.D. if they have symptoms
- Request patients to let your staff know if they have tested positive for Covid-19
- Protocols for social distancing – both space and time allowances
- 'Best practices' cleaning standards (CDC standards) for these Covid days
- Removal of superfluous items from the office (children's toys, magazines, etc.)

Your Compliance Folder should be updated at least yearly, and can serve as a resource to review – perhaps a chapter at a time – at semi-monthly staff meetings. *(You ARE holding staff meetings twice a month, RIGHT?)*

As we work toward returning to our normal levels of business, this may be a good time to bring our Compliance Folders up to date and to review them with our staff. Then we will be ready to care for our patients at the highest level of quality and expertise.