

Strategies for Effective Fee Assessment and Collection for Clinical Services

Policies & Procedures

- Written agency fee collection policies and procedures is a good business practice
- Provide staff training on the policies and procedures and share strategies about how to address fee assessment, payment collection and donation collection. This can be done annually during a staff meeting. Scripts and suggested language are helpful to staff.
- Post fee collection policies on the agency website (translated as appropriate).
- Include fee collection policy information in your agency's recorded telephone message (translated as appropriate).
- Provide financial information (a brief handout that states agency funding sources and the agency policies) – offer at the reception desk or have available in the waiting room (translated as appropriate).
- Post signs that refer to the agency's fee policy and donation policy in your waiting room (translated as appropriate).
- Describe (very briefly) the agency's fee payment policy to patients before they come in for their visit and again when patients check in.
- When a patient checks in with every visit you will ask: *“Are there any changes in your address, income, or insurance information?”*

Agency Strategies

- Provide a quiet place to talk about income and payment.
- Place self-addressed envelopes at the front desk and offer one when the patient checks out (as appropriate).
- Provide patients with receipts that state services received, fee for services, payments received (by pay source if possible) and payment due. Include a space for donations/contributions on the receipt.
- When a patient checks out - what you say and how you act makes an impression:
“Your charge for today is...How much would you like to pay?”
NOT... *“Can you make a payment today?”*
- Accept credit (and debit) cards.
- If patient requests a bill, consider negotiating (as appropriate) for partial payment that day, with a bill for the balance to follow. Regardless of whether partial payment is received, encourage commitment to a payment plan, ideally within a timespan of 30 days or less.
- Keep patient's insurance information up-to-date, every time they come to the clinic. (necessary for billing Medicaid and private insurance)

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How to talk and write about fees and donations/contributions

The following examples could be adapted for written (website, brochure, posted sign) or verbal (phone appointment, check in, check out) messaging to clients. Note the descriptions of fee assessment (sliding scale, services not dependent on ability to pay) and payment methods (including insurance), along with requests for donations.

[The agency] is not a free clinic but service is not dependent on a person's ability to pay. Using your insurance or paying for your visit will help ensure that we can continue to provide high quality, low cost services to our clients. Donations are also welcome.

We provide evaluation and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases and family planning services. Our services are nonjudgmental and confidential, and no one is turned away for inability to pay. Cost: Determined on a sliding fee scale, based on income and family size. Payment: Cash, checks, credit cards, and some insurance including Medicaid. There are some tests that you may be required to pay on the day of your visit. Donations are also welcome.

Charges are based on a sliding fee scale. We accept many forms of health insurance, so please bring your insurance card with you. If you do not have insurance, or choose not to use your insurance, you will be asked to pay something at the time of your visit. We do not send bills to your home so the clinic visit is the only opportunity for you to pay for your care. We accept cash, checks, and credit cards.

***What is the cost of an [HIV, STD or pregnancy] test?** A donation of \$__ is requested for a test, though no one is ever turned away due to an inability to pay.*

*We want to let you know that your clinic services today are paid for [by Medicaid, insurance, etc.]. In addition, **we ask all of our patients** if they would like to make a donation to help cover the cost of their care today. We provide high quality services to anyone who needs them. As you probably know, budgets are really tight these days and every little bit helps."*

We ask all of our clients if they would like to make a contribution to help us offer services to anyone who needs them. Any contributions are appreciated... they help us continue to provide these services to our community. Some people offer \$1 ... In a very short time - \$1 bills add up to cover one person's clinic visit. We really appreciate your support and look forward to seeing you again in the future.

You may want to train staff on responding to patients who say:

"I can't pay today."

"I'll pay you NEXT time I come in."

"I don't have any money today."

"That's not how much they told me this would cost when I made this appointment."

"I've never had to pay before!"

"Oh, just bill me!"

"I made a mistake on my income. I don't think I owe that much."

"I'll mail it to you."