



# Take on the Challenge of Medical Billing

*O.D. tackles learning curve and practice benefits*

**R**ichard C. Malara, O.D., Clay, NY, graduated from optometry school 16 years ago—when the billing and coding medical insurance part of the practice management curriculum was less developed.



**Dr. Malara**

“Learning the process involved with appropriate medical coding and billing has had its challenges, but there are many positives. Patients appreciate that they’re not referred

to another provider, and they appreciate that we can bill their medical insurance company directly. And the practice benefits by being able to retain these patients who might otherwise leave the practice,” he says.

As a result of developing the medical model, Dr. Malara says his revenue is increasing. Medical patients account for about 15 percent of

his patient visits and between 20 percent and 25 percent of the practice revenue. “The lion’s share of what I do each day is refractions, but the medical patients bring variety.”

In fact, says Dr. Malara, medical patients complement the refractive practice. They’re often the same patients—just seen at different times of the year. “I’m seeing my patients on more occasions, such as during allergy season or for ocular emergencies. I feel it has enhanced patients’ perception of what we do, and that’s a big advantage of medical coding,” he says. “Optometry has been underutilized. I have a lot of respect

## Make Recommendations

**D**r. Richard Malara recommends **OPTI-FREE® ReplenISH® MPDS**. “I explain, and the staff reiterates, that not all brands are the same. Store brand formulations can change. OPTI-FREE ReplenISH is not sold as a store brand disinfectant. Most patients don’t know that,” he says. “It’s particularly important for silicone hydrogel lens wearers to use the appropriate lens/solution combination.” Based on the clinical research on corneal staining, he recommends **OPTI-FREE ReplenISH MPDS**. ■



for the M.D.s, but if a patient has to wait to get on an M.D.’s schedule, or if the family physician is prescribing an old-school solution, it behooves the patient to come here.”

Dr. Malara introduced medical coding into the practice about eight years ago. It

*Continued on page 4*



**Last Chance  
to Get in Shape**

New activity pool at The Breakers

**T**he ALLDocs annual meeting will be held from Sunday, October 19, to Thursday, October 23, at The Breakers in Palm Beach, FL. The meeting offers many opportunities for CE and practice management discussions with colleagues in the same practice setting.

The focus of this year’s meeting is on health: personal health and wellness, the health of our patients and the health and profitability of our practices.

After making your hotel reservations (The Breakers can be reached at 888.273.2537), register for the meeting with ALLDocs directly by downloading the registration form on [alldocsod.com](http://alldocsod.com) and mailing it to Dr. Richard Hulst.

Need help with travel? Call Kim Collings at 800.218.9097 or email her at [kimcollings@cinci.rr.com](mailto:kimcollings@cinci.rr.com). ■

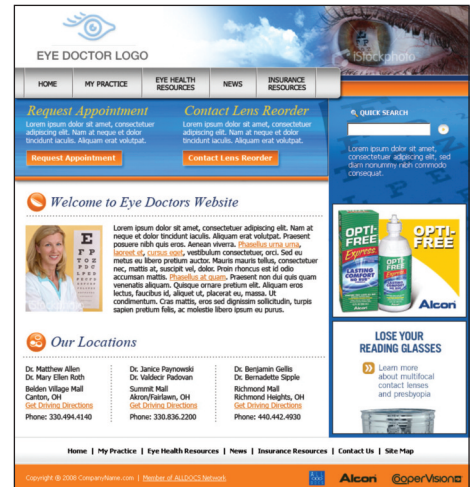
# Upgrade Your Image

*ALLDocs board develops vendor relationship with web site hosting company*

**T**ired of your old web site or confused by the process of creating one? The ALLDocs board has contracted with LogicalSolutions.net, a web site developer with experience in the eye care industry. Company representatives will present a session at the

annual meeting of the ease of creating a web site and array of functionality.

**Shawn Ryan**, the company's Internet consultant, says ALLDocs members can select from several templates and color schemes for an easily customized look. O.D.s can upload



**More information about web site options will be presented at the annual meeting.**

photos or logos, or the system will walk a user through the creation of a basic logo.

Some pages available to ALLDocs members will have material provided by the O.D. directly, and some information will be provided by the ALLDocs network or from other eye health resources.

The web sites can include map locators, contact lens reordering, as well as online appointment scheduling or requests for appointments. For practices already using the LensCrafters online scheduling, the new web sites can link to that.

Alcon and CooperVision are sponsoring the service, significantly lowering the cost for individual O.D.s. ■

## FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

### Strength Training

**M**aintaining a healthy body takes effort. A good diet and exercise are part of the preventive care required. So are visits to doctors. Maintaining a healthy



Dr. Gelb

practice requires similar steps. We feed our practices with a steady diet of new patients and new practice opportunities. Using that analogy, I encourage everyone to make an appointment for one of the most important check-ups of the year—the ALLDocs annual meeting.

This meeting represents a unique opportunity to spend relaxed time with other O.D.s who are cultivating successful practices in similar practice settings. We hear routinely from LensCrafters

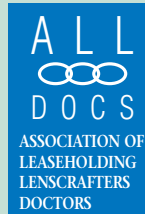
leaseholders who say they get more out an ALLDocs meeting than they do from any other meeting they attend.

This year's meeting is no different. With a focus on the healthy body, we will examine the ways we can keep our patients healthier by understanding more about the diagnosis and management of ocular conditions. By expanding our focus into these medical conditions, we can also ensure the health of our practices.

Your ALLDocs board has also been working on other ways to help ALLDocs members improve their practice communications. After extensive negotiations, we have contracted with LogicalSolutions.net to provide web site hosting and development services for individual practice web sites. Our estimate is that only about half of ALLDocs members currently maintain a practice web site. Yet as patients look to the Internet for more health information, it's critically important that you be there—on the web—so they can find you and understand the range of services you offer.

We'll have more information on this exciting offer for you at the annual meeting. ■

**Kerry Gelb, O.D.**  
drkmg@comcast.net



## O.D. Discusses Solutions with Patients

**D**r. Bill Fox, with four LensCrafters leases in North Carolina, is featured in the fall issue of *Contact Lens Profit Advisor*. Dr. Fox says, "I've changed my philosophy in the past few years. I used to not worry about solutions, but I realize now that they do make a difference." He now recommends OPTI-FREE® RepleniSH® MPDS, telling patients, "Stay on this solution." He also appreciates that the box reminds patients to see their doctor yearly for healthy vision. ■

## GUEST COLUMN FROM COOPERVISION

### Online Resources for O.D.s, Staff and Patients

By Tom Nicholson

**C**ooperVision has a reputation for establishing excellent business relationships with O.D.s and continues that effort by offering two new, free educational resources for your practice.

CooperVision TV ([coopervision.tv](http://coopervision.tv)) has six instructional videos that patients can watch at home or in the office. The videos cover insertion and removal tips, wear and care of contact lenses, as well as the advantages of technology such as Biofinity®, Proclear® and multifocal lenses.

The CooperVision Online Learning Center provides high-quality contact lens training and support. Classes support new product introductions, cover material technology and address topics through 23 courses organized into seven tracks:

- ◆ **New to Eye Care**—seven courses designed for staff training on optics, ocular anatomy, instrumentation and more
- ◆ **Contact Lens Fundamentals**—five courses appropriate for staff, whether or not they fit contacts
- ◆ **Intermediate Contact Lens**—five courses appropriate for fitters and trained office support staff

- ◆ **Advanced Soft Contact Lens Studies**—five applied science courses for the professional

- ◆ **Multifocal Technology**—four courses on advanced contact lens technology for correcting presbyopia

- ◆ **Material Technology**—four courses on the technologies behind CooperVision's Aquaform and PC Hydrogel lens materials

- ◆ **Toric Technology**—three courses on the basics of fitting soft toric lenses

Courses within each curriculum can be taken at any time and in any order, and when staff members complete a track, they receive a framed certificate. The CooperVision Online Learning Center also links to accredited prepaid courses from the Contact Lens Society of America and the American Optometric Association, partners of this CooperVision educational program.

Enroll at [learning.coopervision.com](http://learning.coopervision.com). First-time users need to register via the "Don't have an account?" button. If you have problems registering, contact Jennifer Knab, CooperVision's web support at 800.341.2020 ext. 3515 or via email at [JKnab@coopervision.com](mailto:JKnab@coopervision.com). ■



Tom Nicholson

## Eyes on Health

*Meeting to focus on health, practice growth*

**T**his is a tentative schedule for the annual meeting to be held at The Breakers in Palm Beach, FL. This agenda is subject to change, and updates will be posted on [alldocsod.com](http://alldocsod.com).

### Sunday, October 19th

- ◆ Lunch and golf at The Breakers Golf Course
- ◆ Evening welcome reception

### Monday, October 20th

- ◆ Welcome and presentations by Gold Sponsors, Alcon and CooperVision
- ◆ CE sessions, including two hours on the Healthy Body by **Steven Newman, O.D.**, followed by a session on ARMD by **Jerry Sherman, O.D.**

- ◆ Afternoon CE session on corneal microscopy by **Michael Burton, O.D.**
- ◆ Vendor presentation
- ◆ Focus groups
- ◆ Ragtops off-site dinner event

### Tuesday, October 21st

- ◆ Vendor presentation on Internet contact lens business
- ◆ Vendor presentations
- ◆ **Jack McIntyre, O.D.**, presents Bulletproof Your Contact Lens Business on practice management
- ◆ EMR lunch, moderated by **Michael Sherman**
- ◆ Second golfing event
- ◆ Vendor fair



The Breakers

### Wednesday, October 22nd

- ◆ Vendor presentations
- ◆ **Gabe Mirkin, M.D.**, speaks on Health Update Diabetes/CVA
- ◆ **Charles Brownlow, O.D.**, presents two-hour session on Medical Billing and Coding, sponsored by Alcon
- ◆ Vendor fair
- ◆ Gala evening event at The Breakers

### Thursday, October 23rd

- ◆ Business meeting, followed by practice management CE with **Gary Gerber, O.D.**
- ◆ LensCrafters presentation ■



## IMPLEMENTING THE TOTAL PATIENT CARE MODEL

### The High Cost of Complacency

By John Rumpakis, O.D., M.B.A.

**“New Report Shows CMS Pilot Program Saving Nearly \$700 Million in Improper Medicare Payments”** screams the headline. There’s a temptation to read it casually and think it doesn’t apply to your practice. If you think you’re not at risk for an audit because optometry is small potatoes, you’re wrong; that kind of complacency is a dangerous thing.

Getting paid for an improperly filed claim often creates a false sense of confidence. Payment doesn’t necessarily mean CMS determined the accuracy of that particular claim or that it cannot be reviewed again. So don’t develop a false sense of confidence; be vigilant continually for proper coding, using all of the resources available to you.

I have identified five common billing errors that O.D.s commit every day, so you can double-check your billing practices.

#### The Top Five Mistakes O.D.s Make

1. Failing to establish medical necessity
2. Unbundling services
3. Billing for non-covered services
4. Filing duplicate claims
5. Filing claims with incomplete or invalid group number

In this section, I’ll address the top three.

Failing to establish medical necessity properly in the medical record is far and away one of the biggest issues O.D.s face. There is a very specific definition of medical necessity (available at [medicare.gov](http://medicare.gov)) that must be met for each and every examination/procedure

that you perform on a patient. If you fail to meet this standard, that payment you received for the particular service/procedure is at risk.

Secondly, some services are to be performed together. Breaking them apart to gain a higher reimbursement is verboten. Make sure that you adhere every day to the CPT guidelines, the CCI guidelines and the rules of your local carriers. These rules and guidelines change constantly, so you must stay on top of these issues to ensure compliance of your practice.

The third area, one where O.D.s need to be vigilant and careful, is in only having a covered diagnosis for a procedure. Having a covered diagnosis solely is not enough to pass muster on an audit. I have seen many O.D.s who manufacture a diagnosis just to get a service covered. Let me be clear. Don’t do that. According to the ICD-9 guidelines, you cannot use the patient’s chief complaint or symptom as the diagnosis when you know the cause of that chief complaint or symptom.

Simply stated, just because you submit a claim and it gets paid does not mean that you submitted the claim properly. Carriers do not audit on a claim-by-claim basis, but they recover their money on post-payment reviews.

There are many resources to help keep you updated. The ReimbursementPLUS suite ([ReimbursementPLUS.com](http://ReimbursementPLUS.com)), which contains the local carrier policies, the CCI guidelines, CPT code properties, and all CPT and ICD-9 manuals all in one online resource, is one such source. Tools like these are invaluable because they can help you stay profitable and, more importantly, safe in the knowledge that your claims are being filed correctly...the first time. ■



Dr. Rumpakis

### Medical Billing

*Continued from page 1*

is continuing to pick up momentum—especially in glaucoma management—now that he has added more diagnostic instrumentation, including a visual field analyzer and laser scanner. He anticipates a quick return on the investment as he gains more glaucoma patients.

Letting patients know what services he can provide “starts in the exam

room,” he says. “At the first visit, I explain to patients what is within my ability and legal scope of practice. The American Optometric Association’s Statement of Practice, which defines our abilities to treat and manage ocular disease, is posted in the office.”

Dr. Malara notes that incorporating medical billing doesn’t require a large financial investment. “Ocular allergies, dry eyes and most eye infections are easy places to start. Op-

tometrists are already treating those conditions, and the coding is relatively simple. Plus, Alcon has developed effective products for those conditions. I use TRAVATAN® and TRAVATAN Z® solutions for my patients with elevated IOP, VIGAMOX® solution for bacterial conjunctivitis, SYSTANE® Lubricant Eye Drops for dry eyes and PATANOL® and PATADAY™ Ophthalmic Solutions as my drops of choice for ocular allergy patients.” ■