



BY DAVID E. SCHWEIGHOFER, ESQ.

— DOCTOR? — IT'S TIME FOR YOUR ANNUAL CHECK UP...

AS YOU KNOW, it is important to have an annual checkup, for your health, and the health of your practice. Please be seated. You do not have to disrobe.

Now, let's begin with a review of systems, where we ask you to consider the status of ten important aspects of your practice. This exam will not be painful, but some doctors have reported side-effects, including headache.

1. Let's talk HIPAA. We all know the importance of maintaining confidentiality in regard to the protected health information of your patients, but you've read about the data breaches. Did you know that the Office of Civil Rights (OCR), tasked with enforcement of the HIPAA regulations, requires you to perform a security risk analysis? Did you know OCR is doing random audits of providers, including solo practitioners and group practices?

2. Tell me about your electronic medical record. Have you received meaningful use dollars? Can you survive an audit and not have to re-pay those dollars?

3. Are you experiencing stress because you have waited too long to snag those CMEs? Plan now — don't wait until the last minute.

4. How about those denied claims? Have you reviewed the causes and put into place the necessary remedies? Do you think you have a good chance on appeal? Better call for a consult.

5. Open wide. Let me look at your insurance and provider reimbursement agreements. Are they current? Describe the rates. Is there anything we could be doing here to negotiate for better reimbursement?

6. Do you have any symptoms of an unhappy work force, among your employees or independent contractors? Job descriptions current? Benefits in place? About that employee manual, is it current?

7. Relax. We just want to review your malpractice coverage. Adequate? Current? It is time to do some shopping and cost comparisons?

8. Inhale deeply. Tell me about any employment agreements you may have. Are they current and signed? Is it time for discussion about renewal, or do they renew automatically? Compensation? Exhale.

9. Please close your eyes. Speak slowly and describe the documents in your corporate folder. Think about the status of space and equipment leases, Medicare provider information, vendor agreements, your financial relationships with pharmaceutical companies or device companies that should be reported under the "sunshine" law, your billing company, and your accountant. Anything else?

10. Most importantly, describe your balance. The balance in your professional and personal lives. Your spouse, your children — are you spending time with them? When did you last send flowers or a surprise to your spouse? Are you eating well, getting enough rest, and exercising? Is your estate plan in place? How about your living will and durable power of attorney for healthcare?

There. Now that didn't really hurt all that much. But this checklist touches on aspects of your practice that need regular attention. Doing so usually results in a reduction of stress, improved productivity, and in many instances improved revenue, and cost avoidance.

One last question: When is the last time you saw your doctor for a checkup?

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