

Reducing Risk

A Publication on Healthcare Risk Management from Princeton Insurance

Event Reporting

Introduction

A system for reporting events (often called incidents) is an important component of patient safety in a medical or dental office practice. An event reporting system helps to assure that occurrences, injuries, near misses, etc. are promptly identified, investigated, and analyzed to determine if improvements or changes are required. The purpose of event reporting is to improve patient care; prevent adverse events from being repeated; and protect patients, visitors, and staff from harm.

The involvement and support of all physicians and management staff are essential for an effective event reporting system. The office culture must be non-punitive and convey the message to all staff that event reporting is valued. The system should be easy to use, and improvements resulting from the event reporting must be evident. All staff must be educated on what and how to report and its importance.

Events to Report

In healthcare, a reportable event or incident is defined broadly as any situation that is not consistent with either the routine operation of a facility/office, or the routine care of a particular patient. ***Injury does not have to occur.*** The potential for injury and/or property damage is sufficient for an occurrence to be considered an event. Incidents may involve patients, medical staff, employees, and visitors.

Reportable events in the office setting include:

- Bodily injury or near injury to any individual
- Emotional trauma (e.g., angry or violent outburst)
- Any use of emergency measures such as CPR
- Medication or treatment errors or allergic reactions
- Medical device-related events
- Any observed breaches of health/safety/privacy standards, office policy or procedure
- Statements or actions by any person that suggest a possible legal claim against the practice

Event Report Content

The event report should contain only factual and objective information; there should be no conclusions, opinions, accusations, or admissions. Event reporting is not meant to place blame on any individual, nor is it an admission of negligence.

In most instances, the employee or staff member who is involved in or observes an event should complete the event report. The report should be completed timely, preferably at the time the event is witnessed or discovered.

An event report form should contain the following information:

- Date and time of the report
- Date and time of the event
- Name, address and telephone number of the person affected (e.g., patient, employee, visitor)
- Name, address and telephone number of person(s) witnessing the event
- Location of the event
- Factual description of the event, including key observations
- Condition of the affected person immediately after the event, including any complaints of injury and observed injuries
- The identity of the staff member to whom the event was reported and, if applicable, the response, such as examining the patient or giving an order
- The manufacturer, model and lot or batch number of any medical device involved
- Identity and signature of the individual preparing the report

All professional and office staff must be instructed in the proper methods for reporting events. They should also be directed not to write any personal notes about an event, since such writings could be discovered in a lawsuit and may contain damaging comments. Proper reporting of factual information only in event forms reduces the likelihood that a plaintiff's attorney would find any benefit in their use or discovery.

Medical Record Documentation

Document in the medical record the pertinent factual information regarding any unanticipated event that results in an injury to a patient. Include a description of what occurred and any medical or other attention that was provided immediately following the event. ***The fact that an event report was prepared should never be documented in the medical record.***

Application of Event Report Data

Data from event reports should be collected and analyzed to identify the factors or processes that are contributing to the reported events, and to identify areas for change or improvement. Analysis should be followed by development and implementation of efforts to eliminate or reduce the factors identified as contributing to the incident. Soliciting ideas from all staff for improvement can also contribute to team

building and a sense of shared responsibility for accomplishing the selected goals. Provide regular feedback to all staff on the results of the practice's efforts to improve patient care and reduce risks.

Confidentiality of the Event Report

Event reports are ***confidential*** documents and should be clearly marked as such. They are not part of the patient's medical record and must be kept separate from the medical record. They also should be protected from access by unauthorized personnel, and the number of persons having access to them should be as limited as possible. Do not make copies of event reports.

Event reports also should not be placed in personnel files or be used as the basis for a disciplinary action, as this would discourage reporting and be inconsistent with a non-punitive culture of care. However, employees should be advised that failure to report an event could lead to disciplinary action and termination. If in doubt about whether an event is reportable, the prudent course for all personnel is to report it.

In New Jersey there are no state laws that absolutely protect an event report in a physician's or dentist's office from discovery during the course of a malpractice lawsuit. However, no healthcare practitioner should ever be deterred from completing and acting upon an event report. The benefits of promoting patient safety and reducing the risk of other lawsuits outweigh the potential risk of a properly prepared event report being discovered in a lawsuit.

For more information about reducing risk at your practice, please view our risk management newsletter at www.RiskReviewOnline.com. To access additional Reducing Risk documents, visit our website at www.PrincetonInsurance.com and click on "healthcare risk services."

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