LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Following the completion of this chapter, the reader will be able to:

1. Describe the elements of proper documentation for reimbursement purposes.
2. Identify the legal issues surrounding reimbursement.

There is one main principle to adhere to when applying for reimbursement for athletic training services: If it is not documented, it did not happen! The corollary to that statement is: If it did not happen, it will not be reimbursed. There are many other barriers to reimbursement that will be encountered throughout the process, but that rule, if ignored, is insurmountable.

The purpose of this chapter is to guide the athletic training student through the mechanisms of applying for reimbursement; documentation being the key! It is a general overview, since each institution or organization employing athletic trainers will have its own criteria for being paid for services rendered by the athletic trainer. This chapter is also limited to the reimbursement process general to outpatient clinical practice. It will become obvious that there are 2 types of documentation necessary for reimbursement: documentation on patient treatment or status and documentation required by payers for payment of services. While athletic trainers are certainly employed in venues that treat workers’ compensation clients or Medicare/Medicaid patients, the documentation and practice requirements of those patients are beyond the comprehensive level of this chapter.

Parameters Affecting Reimbursement

Legal Issues

The first requirement to be met by the athletic trainer is that the state wherein the athletic trainer is practicing legislatively allows the athletic trainer to bill for services rendered. In other words, the profession of athletic training must be regulated by the state, and the regulatory act must allow for billing of services. The athletic trainer is responsible for knowing the law that governs his or her profession. It is not the responsibility of the employer, although the employer should be cognizant of the appropriate law to prevent asking the athletic trainer to inadvertently violate the law. Though it is technically not legal to have a law passed restricting an athletic trainer from being reimbursed for his or her services, it is a common practice of insurance payers to not reimburse nonregulated/licensed providers.

A common example of inadvertent violation of law is having a clinical athletic trainer treat a Medicare patient and then bill an intermediary for the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) for the services. CMS is a division of the Health and Human Services Agency (HHS) of the federal government. While athletic trainers are able to treat Medicare patients, CMS cannot be billed for the services rendered by an athletic trainer. Athletic trainers are not recognized as approved providers in the Medicare Act.

Pearl of Wisdom

Get connected! Log on to the federal government’s Web site for the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (www.cms.hhs.gov). Know what restrictions are placed on providers of services for patients who qualify for these benefits.