



I Need a New Pathology Billing Partner *Where do I even begin?*

Top 20 Important Questions to Ask

Before you invest too much of your valuable time or let an RCM company salesperson point you in the directions they want you to go, here are some foundational questions that demand evidence from a prospective billing company. For further due diligence questions, go to www.healthpromedical.com/pathologyanswers

1. Are they experts in billing pathology services?

Expertise in pathology billing can be demonstrated by a number of factors such as confirmation of certified pathology coders, subject matter experts in each area of the billing process and strong \$/RVU performance.

In addition to these vital elements, it is critical that you validate the expertise of your billing process by talking directly with a pathologist and/or practice manager that has enough knowledge of billing to lend credibility to your inquiry.

2. How long has the billing company been in business *and* how long has the current management structure been in place?

As with any industry, mergers and acquisitions can play a significant role in the company you're considering going with. While M&A transactions sometimes provide economies of scale and cost advantages to the billing entities, profit is often enhanced through less client service, less attention to detail and less labor allocated to your account. Further, M&A activity often sends good management staff into the market to seek better opportunities, as post-acquisition environments are often less than desirable for good long-term staff.

3. Are they stable?

Is the billing company on a good growth curve? In other words, are they growing at a sufficient rate to continue to deploy new technological innovations, yet at a pace that maintains a high level of quality?

4. Do they have a demonstrated track record of success?

Can the billing company produce multiple references from other pathology groups that demonstrate a 3-year or more track record of outstanding performance? Things to look for include stable and growing revenue per RVU, denied claims rates less than 4-5%, revenue recovery on denied claims of at least 80% of the yield on total claims, 4% or less of balances being turned over to collections, to name a few.

5. Is their coding staff fully certified and are they specifically trained in pathology?

Many billing companies state they have certified coders. But will they commit to having your coding performed by domestic, certified, experienced pathology coders? And, are they dedicated to pathology with regular training and updates specific to coding?

6. Do they operate with complete transparency?

When you ask your questions, are the answers fact-based or fluffed up? Do you get direct answers or creative side steps? From the very first question you ask, keep a focus on getting answers to the questions, "Are they being transparent? Am I finding integrity?" Most of us have an inner sense of whether or not someone is shooting straight. Trust your inner instinct. It can save you much grief, make you profitable and most importantly, give you peace of mind.

7. Will there be a high-level, dedicated and accessible point of contact for your account?

You may have never experienced this, but we've heard it many times from frustrated pathologists: "I can't get a hold of my customer service rep!" Or, "They promise to get this for me when I do get them, but they don't deliver," or "I can't get any information that helps me understand my practice!"

8. Do they outsource their coding services?

Outsourced coding is a great thing, when you have qualified people and the necessary policies and procedures to manage the underlying functions. In fact, we provide domestic outsource coding services as part of our offering to pathologists. But if a billing company delegates this important clinical/administrative piece, it's vital for you to gain a thorough understanding of

how they manage quality control, turnaround times and other pertinent attributes of the relationship.

9. Do they offshore their coding services or any other aspect of their billing processes?

Are you comfortable with the risks of having medical records accessed or transferred outside the United States? Many billing companies offshore their coding services, but some do not disclose they are sending the work offshore to save a buck. Ask the questions. Find out enough information to know whether or not you are truly comfortable with the processes and quality control they have in place. Why? Because Medicare and other governmental and commercial carriers hold "you" liable as the Provider for any irregularities or data breaches.

10. To what extent, if any, are audits conducted to validate receipt of all procedures performed?

Ask the company to describe "specifically" how they validate that all the exams you have performed are confirmed in their billing system. They should be able to give you explicit detail about the process and how they manage the process to make sure everything you do gets billed.

11. How does the billing company demonstrate they are working on your denials?

The billing entity should describe:

- The process in how they handle the receipt of denied claims.
- The turnaround time for responding to denied claims.
- The follow up process to ensure the denied claim is reprocessed.
- The reporting process to provide you feedback on denied claims.

The monthly denial metrics and benchmark reports including return on denial resubmissions.

12. What processes do they have in place to ensure timely processing of claims?

A great billing company should be able to walk you through a high-level flow chart describing the billing process and how claims are initiated, followed up on and resolved.

13. How do they handle payor reimbursement validations?

Ask the billing company to specifically describe how they validate payors are paying per their contracts and what steps they take when irregularities occur.

14. Are their billing processes fully compliant with all Federal, state and local laws and regulations?

While this one is much more difficult to affirm, make sure that any contract you sign explicitly demands compliance with all laws and regulations.

15. Do they have a living and effective compliance plan?

Ask the billing company for a copy of its most current compliance plan, then ask for a summary of all the compliance activities that have occurred within the company for the last 6 months. This request will speak volumes about how “living” the living compliance plan really is. If a compliance plan isn’t documented, current and living, there’s a good chance you are taking unnecessary risks in having them manage your billing activities.

16. Are they committed to taking care of your patients with the highest level of service?

One of the best ways to find out how patients are really handled is to have your practice manager or other designated individual physically spend one hour in your billing company’s call center. Any great billing company will welcome the opportunity to have you hear firsthand how patients, even complex situations, are responded to, ideally with patience and compassion.

If your patients’ needs aren’t met, the negative feedback to your hospital or facility can create headaches and have even put physician groups’ hospital contracts at risk. A physical visit to the company you are having manage your multimillion-dollar operation is a wise investment of your time and resources.

17. Do their current clients confirm that their leadership team and staff are trustworthy?

Many billing companies are structured in a way that the pathologists they serve and their practice managers only have one point of contact. But over time, a great billing company will provide critical feedback, interaction and information that is likely to gain your exposure to key personnel in coding, billing analysis, payor contracting

and other areas of subject matter expertise. While you may not want or need that direct contact, finding out if a billing company has depth of knowledge and expertise is valuable insight which can confirm you are making a good long-term decision.

18. What is the average tenure of their employees?

Long tenure is great if you have quality people and it’s negative if you have people that aren’t proactive and productive, so there are really two things to find out:

1. Have the company explain how they manage and treat their people.
2. What is the average tenure of billing personnel? If a company is growing too fast or can’t retain top talent, they may be paying too little, not giving people the resources they need, or maintaining a less than favorable environment. Regardless of the reasons, “their turnover rate” matters to you in every aspect of the billing process. You need, no you deserve, to be supported by a company that has top talent, retains top talent and demonstrates its commitment as a business to long term investment in human resources to support you and your patients’ needs.

19. Will they provide you with the data and reports you need to make educated decisions for your practice that will enhance your revenue?

Make sure the reports you receive are consistent and timely, have data integrity, and will help you make educated decisions for your practice. Find out if the billing company has the technology in place to support your reporting needs. For information on HealthPro’s Dashboard and reporting capabilities, go to healthpromedical.com/services/data-analytics

20. How do they stay on top of industry changes and trends?

Ask the billing company to demonstrate what it does practically to stay current on trends, regulations, legislation, risks, compliance, etc. Find out what the company does internally with regard to training and education. Ask them about involvement in national organizations such as CAP, APF, ASCP or the Healthcare Business Management Association (HBMA). Are they actively involved? Do they serve on committees? Do they attend their educational events? If not, why not? You want someone who stays current and ahead of the game if they’re managing your reimbursement.