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Quiz shows experts lack practice management knowledge

They don't teach business skills in medical school. You knew that, of course. But how lacking are clinicians in practice management acumen? More than you might imagine, if the results of one unscientific test are any indication.

Practice management and revenue cycle management firm MTBC quizzed 50 or so physicians and nurse practitioners in primary care at a recent medical education conference, and the average clinician got only 7.5 of 20 questions right. The highest scorer, Red Bank, N.J., internist David Hyppolite MD, answered 13 questions correctly – and won a tour of New York City aboard MTBC's private airplane.

That free plane ride was won for getting only 65% of the questions right. Assuming no grading curve, that's a D. Just about everybody else failed a test of medical billing, claims submission, reimbursement, healthcare administration and electronic medical records software. The multiple-choice questions included the meaning of common acronyms like HIPAA and CPT, the number of uninsured in the country and Medicare payment policies. "Billing is a very difficult and challenging process, and it changes every day," says MTBC President David Rosenblum. "You have to be as good at billing as you are at patient care." The results of this informal survey point to the complexity of practice management that has left so many doctors and office managers flummoxed – and perpetually chasing reimbursements.

The fact that payers change their rules so frequently does not make things any easier, of course. "You've got to watch it. You can't take your eye off the ball," says Rosenblum, who is admittedly using the results of the experiment to tout his company's services.

Rosenblum says he was particularly surprised at how few respondents were aware that Medicare will pay bonuses for electronic prescribing starting in January. Then again, the conference took place before last month's Physician Office Technology Report came out (PBN 11/3/08).

For the record, we scored 12 of 20 on the quiz. Try for yourself at http://www.mtbc.com/Practice_Management_Quiz.aspx.