

## PRACTICE PEARLS

### Q & A

#### Obtaining compensation and coding data

**Q** I am involved in contract negotiations with my hospital employer, and I would like to obtain comparative information on work relative value units (RVUs), evaluation and management (E/M) code usage, visit types and yearly compensation – all broken down by physician specialty and geographic location. Are there free resources available to me?

**A** The Medical Group Management Association (MGMA) publishes its Physician Compensation and Production Survey each year. A good reference librarian may be able to help you track down a copy, perhaps via interlibrary loan. Otherwise, you will need to purchase a copy from the MGMA. Links to purchase either a CD or printed version of the 2011 report based on 2010 data are available at <http://www.mgma.com/physcomp/>.

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services has free information on its web site regarding E/M code use by specialty, based on Medicare billing data. You can find that data at <http://go.cms.gov/hj7ypl>. Scroll down that page to the heading "E/M Codes by Specialty."

The American Medical Group Association (AMGA) fields the Medical Group Compensation and Financial Survey, and according to the organization's web site, participants in the 2011 survey will receive a complimentary copy of the final print publication. For more information, see the AMGA web site: [http://www.amga.org/Research/grpCompSurvey\\_research.asp](http://www.amga.org/Research/grpCompSurvey_research.asp).

Finally, Merritt Hawkins, a physician recruitment firm, does physician salary and compensation surveys and makes some of its reports available through its web site: <http://www.merrithawkins.com/compensation-surveys.aspx>.

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#### Eliminate stethoscope background noise

I always listen to patients' chests with the stethoscope on bare skin and not through layers of clothes. Oftentimes, though, when the patient is wearing a shirt, the stethoscope bell underneath it rubs against the shirt creating background noise that could be misrepresented as crackles or rhonchi.

To eliminate this problem, I simply place my palm over the bell of the stethoscope beneath the shirt while I am listening. This also saves the patient from having to change into a gown for most visits that require a cardiorespiratory exam.

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FPM

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