stratford notes

S tratford is getting many new customers who have been using software that is not Y2K compliant.

These new customers question how Stratford plans to keep up with all the necessary billing changes. They should be concerned since their present software did not keep up to date, or the updates are very expensive.

The ICD codes are going to change and many people are concerned since the new code will have more characters and all present databases will not be compliant. The new code is longer and will begin sometime after the year 2000. Many people will purchase an upgrade to their present software so they will be Y2K compliant and then need to purchase another upgrade in a year or so for the new ICD codes.

There are many more changes that will make all present billing software obsolete. In past newsletters, we have outlined many of these.

For example, all payers will be assigned a unique code that must be used on all billing documents and in all EDI (electronic claims) transmissions. This is a Federal Government mandated requirement for all private as well as governmental healthcare billing.

Providers will also be assigned a unique code that must be used with all billing.

You can find Stratford's Internet server at this address:

inside this issue . . . .

Stratford has nearly **3,900** licensed users

This may replace the present UPIN and PIN numbers.

Another consequence of the code changes forms changes. The present HCFA 1500 and UB92 forms must be redesigned also.

It is very important that all providers insure that their software vendor is planning for these and other changes so that they are able to continue billing without making major changes. It is also important to know how updates are made available. Will it cost thousands of dollars and require a major database change and even downtime?

All Stratford customers know the answer to these questions. Stratford has new billing requirements built into the software in advance of the date they become mandatory. As of this date, all customers who subscribe to the Stratford software maintenance plan continuously receive updates at no additional cost. •

FROM THE EDI CORNER ......

Stratford has been developing a software design that will convert the data contained in the database to a format named XML. We believe this (or its successor) will be the main format used for patient information interchange between different computerized systems in the future. Future versions of the Stratford program will capture more patient clinical information. The reason for this has been reported in many articles in this newsletter in the past. The government as well as private insurers are beginning to require more information related to "outcomes". In other words, it is fine that the provider saw the patient for 30 minutes and charges "x" amount. They want to know about the value of the service in terms of what good the patient received. The provider may be required to report results of the treatment that patients receive. The Stratford program will need to have the capability of storing and reporting this information in order for the provider to be paid or to qualify for a contract, etc.

Microsoft has "XML enabled" all the applications in the new Office 2000 product. This suite of products includes Microsoft Word, Excel and other related programs. XML allows you to transfer information between these programs. An example of the usefulness would be to transfer fields from your transaction file into Excel for analysis or to create a chart.
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SOFTWARE DOWNCODING

Some of this information was reported in the AMA news and other places. There is a software program named "patterns" which an HMO can use to downcode the charges submitted on a provider's claim. Downcoding involves paying doctors based on an insurance code representing a brief or uncomplicated office visit, even if the service provided to the patient involved extensive time and care.

A specific case involved an HMO in Florida. This HMO used the software in other states, however they used the software on a much larger scale in Florida. About four months after introducing the software in Florida, the Florida Medical Association asked the state Department of Insurance to investigate the HMO for their downcoding activities.

Some physicians refused to treat patients covered by the HMO.

At this time only about 100 Florida doctors have their bills reviewed by the software. These 100 doctors were identified as the ones asking to be paid the highest rate possible for most of their patients' office visits. •

EDI "per-claim" charges
Stratford does not have any "per-claim" or other charges related to transmitting claims to Medicare or any other carrier. We only charge (optional) for providing software support.

HEALTHCARE WEB SITES

We usually try to limit our articles in this newsletter to billing issues. Here is a report on a web site that has information on a wide variety of healthcare related matters. The Internet address is: www.DrKoop.com
The web site is named after Dr Koop. You remember who Dr. Koop is don't you?

Dr. Nancy Snyderman has many good articles in the "Daily Health" section. These articles are about common myths and health related questions. Examples are: "Myths and Misconceptions about Kids and Fever", "Children & Exercise - A Healthy Match", "Between Skin and Sun", "Staying Healthy in the Summer Heat". There is a web page with a form to fill out to submit questions to Dr. Snyderman. There is an archive page so you can read past articles.

There is a Health News page with a summary of Healthcare related news.

There is a page titled: "Conditions & Concerns". You can select from an extensive, alphabetical list of diseases and concerns and find information that is current. The lists are separated into logical categories such as Diseases, Mental Health, Minor conditions (allergies, cold & flu, etc.)

There is a section of the web site titled "Nutrition". It has articles that are useful now such as "Cool summer snacks". There is a healthy recipe section and tips on meal planning.

There is a "chat" section that allows real-time conversations with experts in various healthcare related fields.

There is an on-line drugstore page that lists many web sites that will fill your prescriptions. On the same page there is a drug checker that will accept a list of drugs and tell you about any interaction problems.

There is a separate section for over-the-counter drugs and other "essentials". There is an extensive section on Vitamins and supplements.

Several of the web pages have a poll that you can fill out that relates to the information on that particular page.

This web site is not a "commercial" web site with things to sell. The format is more like a community service.

See I told you this would be about non-billing issues. •

SOFTWARE SUPPORT NOTES

1 **Faxed requests for support get <u>Priority</u> <u>Service</u>.**

2 **If you send a fax with a description of the problem, your call is given priority over other faxes**.

3 **Do not call more than one time. The second call places your first call at the bottom of our callback list.**

We can receive many calls in the first few hours each day. It usually is not possible for us to have a technical support person waiting to take your call. If you just call and leave the message "please call", your call is placed at the bottom of the callback list. We must do everything we can to avoid "phone-tag". Hand-written faxes can be almost impossible to read, so please type them whenever possible. Include the best time to call you.
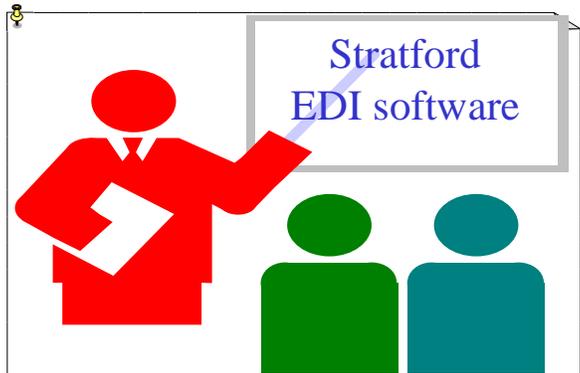
At this time we can deliver support by email. If you check your email each day, you may find this to be easier than faxing us. This is not very good support if you need a quick answer. We do not get very many support email messages so we only check the mail two or three times each day. As the volume increases, we will put more resources into email.

We are interested in hearing from people who would like to receive support by email. •

Stratford   will pay
you $100 for   each person*
you refer who   purchases
Stratford Software at full price ($895). Simply fax or write to give us your referral. **We must receive the referral notice in advance of the sale**. **We cannot pay for a referral if you notify us after the sale.**
*<u>Subject to restrictions</u>

INTERNET RESOURCES

Subject: Comics on the 'net.

I know you have come to expect Healthcare Internet sites here. This month we had to show you something different. If you don't care about any of the comics in the newspaper, don't read the rest of this.

This is a really neat site:

http://www.sdsc.edu/~jeff/comics/Cornucopia.html

They monitor 321 comics! You can create a custom web page with all your favorite comics and see them every day without reading the newspaper! It is updated at 7AM daily PST and they keep two weeks history if you miss a day.

If this is a waste of time for you, let us know by email at:
nomorecomics@stratfordsoftware.com