As I was waiting to talk with a practice manager about the group’s collection strategy, I started eavesdropping on patient registration conversations. “Do you still live at 123 Main Street?” a woman behind the counter asked. “Is all your insurance information the same?”

If your registration staff asks these questions, follow these tips to reduce your returned mail and insurance denials while increasing the collectability of your patient balances.

**Problem:** Poor scripting of patient registration questions.

**Solution:** Good scripting and training will encourage patients to help you help them and allow you to collect all of the current information. A big smile and a compliment go a long way toward accomplishing goal No. 1. Place small mirrors where staff can ensure they’re smiling when a patient walks up. This sets a positive tone for the conversation.

Our next step: getting patients to help you. The script goes like this:

“You seem like a helpful person, Mr. Trump. Will you answer a few questions to help me get you registered?”

Asking for Mr. Trump’s help makes him much more cooperative. The next step is to collect current information, and the practice is on its way to greater profitability. The secret to accomplishing goal No. 2 is pretending every patient is a first-time visitor. The script should always sound like this:

“Can you spell your first and last name for me?”

“What is your home phone number?”

“What is your cell-phone number?”

“What is your current address?”

“What is your date of birth?”

“What is the name of your employer?”

“May I make a copy of your driver’s license and latest insurance card?”

Do you ever hear this objection: “I was told not to give out my Social Security number.” Here is a response that keeps the conversation positive and productive: “You’re absolutely right not to give that out to people at businesses you don’t know, Mr. Trump. We do need it though, so we don’t get your account mixed up with anyone else’s.” (Show him how he benefits.)

Here are your action steps to reduce returned mail and insurance denials, while maximizing collectability of your patient balances:

- Purchase small mirrors (less than 6 inches by 6 inches) for registration workstations to encourage smiles.
- Write out scripts for staff to follow and practice role-playing until it sounds natural.
- Post this script in your registration workstations as an easy reminder.
- Monitor your office’s mail returns and give a prize ($20 gift cards) to the staff member responsible for the fewest returns.