In this Issue:
- Transportation or Travel?
- What if my activity combines rehab with socialization?

Travel is a billable component of a reimbursable service when a clinician provides a specialty mental health service at a location other than the office. So, for example, if a clinician travels from SLO Adult Outpatient Clinic to Sierra Vista Emergency Department (ED) to evaluate a client, the Progress Note would include the time it takes to drive to and from the ED. The clinician would also bill for documentation time. Here is how it looks in a time line using round numbers:

Travel to ED   Crisis Intervention service    Travel back to clinic    Documentation
(:20) (:60) (:20) (:15)

In this example, the total billed would be 1:55 (115 minutes). Travel is reimbursable because it is a component of the service. That is the easy part and is review for everyone.

Transportation scenarios can get trickier, because merely transporting a client is neither a reimbursable activity nor a component of a reimbursable activity. Transportation is not included in the Progress Note as Travel Time.

Some of the time spent transporting a client can be billable, though. If a clinician actively provides interventions in the car, this billable Service Time. Quiet time or casual conversation during the trip is not billable. To determine what is billable, the clinician separates Service Time (time spent providing an intervention) from ‘taxi/ambulance driver’ time. Staff can bill for the former but not for the latter. In the example above, if the clinician brings the client back with them to the PHF and provides ongoing interventions during the drive from the ED, that is a billable continuation of the Crisis Intervention service and not Travel Time. The total time billed would still be 1:55, but it would be allocated differently than the time line above – Service Time would be 1:20 and there would only be travel for the trip to the ED.

Clinical interventions are billable when provided while driving!

Here is another example for what it would look like in a time line if staff transported a client from the ED to Vista Del Mar if some of the drive included billable interventions and some of the time did not:

Traveled to ED    Crisis Intervention    Transport to VDM & return    Documentation
(Billable, :20) (At ED and in car, billable 1:30) (Unbillable, 3:30) (Billable, :15)
In this example, the clinician would enter 1:30 for Service Time, :20 for Travel Time, and :15 for Documentation Time for a total of 2:05 (125 minutes), even though the whole event took much more time. Staff write in the body of the Progress Note: “Transported client to Vista Del Mar (3:30, not billed)” this makes it clear that we are separating out what is billable from what is not billable.

Rehabilitation Services and Socialization Activities (Day Treatment has different rules)
The principles described above are also true when billable services, such as Individual or Group Rehabilitation, are linked together with unbillable activities, such as transportation and socialization. Here is a common example:

A TMHA staff member leaves his office at 9 AM and travels to a client's home (:10), picks the client up and transports the client to Laguna Park (:15) to meet with peers for a socialization activity. The socialization activity lasts 1:00. The staff member then takes the client back home (:15) and returns to TMHA office (:10) and writes a Progress Note (:10) and is finished at 11 AM.

Question: What is billable in this scenario?

Answer: It depends on what the staff member and the client do in the car!

- If they listen to the radio, chat, make small talk, etc., nothing is billable because no service with interventions occurred. Without a service, this is transportation, not travel.

- If the staff member provides a service (For example: helps the client recognize social anxiety, role plays starting a conversation, practices deep breathing, monitoring/changing self-talk, etc.) while driving, then the time spent engaging in these interventions and the travel to and from the client’s home is billable because the travel is a component of a reimbursable activity. The time the client and peers are engaged in socialization and the time spent driving the client when no service is provided is still not billable. Here is a timeline of this example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>9:00</th>
<th>Travel (10)</th>
<th>Rehab (15)</th>
<th>Socialization (Unbillable, 1:00)</th>
<th>Rehab (5)</th>
<th>Transportation (Unbillable, 10)</th>
<th>Travel (10)</th>
<th>Documentation (10)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11:00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Progress Note billing ribbon would look like this: Service Time (:20) + Travel Time (:20) + Documentation (:10) = Total (:50). In the body of the Progress Note, the staff would document the interventions provided and note that the socialization activity and transportation (1:10) were not billed.

Tips for documenting outings and activities

1. Provide and clearly document the specific interventions you provide before and after the activity. The purpose of the activity and your interventions must be related to the client’s goals/objectives and focused on reducing impairments that result from the included diagnosis.

   - **Before the outing:** Focus your interventions before the activity on helping the client develop the skills needed for the activity to be successful. Identifying obstacles, developing coping strategies,
learning or rehearsing skills, and anticipating and preparing for setbacks are common examples of rehab interventions. Clearly document what you did in your Progress Note.

- **During the outing:**
  Time spent actively providing an intervention is billable, but watching a client socialize is not. Clearly document the interventions you provided and explicitly state what occurred that was not billed in the note (“Client and peers engaged in a walk and talk activity, 3:00, not billed”)

- **After the outing:**
  Debrief -- talk about what went well, what could improve, etc. Provide feedback and give your client an opportunity to describe the experience for his/her point of view. We all learn from successes and failures. Be sure to have this conversation and document it as a billable intervention.

2. Travel and Documentation are only billable if a service occurred.

3. Transportation is not billable. Explicitly state in the Progress Note that time spent merely transporting a client from A to B was not billed.

4. Make sure your billing reflects the services provided and not additional time. Just because an activity is not billable does not mean it lacks value!