A Bill You Can Understand - Team Robert and Sharon

Notes from Sharon on Medical Bills.

Background: My interest in this stems from assisting in the care of an elderly parent and disabled brother. I have the following recommendations.

1. Please do NOT use color-coding to indicate important areas of a bill, as there are many color-blind patients. Instead, use a distinct visual component that does not rely on color.
2. Separate the bill total from its itemizations, by putting the bill on one page, and the itemizations on a separate page. This will help with cognition.
3. Make the bill available on a web format as well as on paper so that those who rely on screen-readers are able to read the bill. Also, build-in “Zoom Text” capability so that the text may be enlarged by those with poor vision.
4. Ensure the web-based platform is mobile-friendly so that those with motor disabilities can fill out the forms by touch rather than struggle with pen and paper. This allow more control over the process.
5. Ensure that the web-based, mobile platform works on phones so that those who are busy, or are ill, can check on the bill when time and/or health allows.
6. Develop push-notifications for web-based bills. They are great reminders for those who have drug-altered minds from the medications they are taking.
7. In very large letters, put contact information in event of bill questions, and hours of operation. Please.
8. Associate dates with the itemized bills. When patients are ill, they have multiple office visits, so it helps to understand what an item on the bill is for if a date is associated with it. From there, patients and care-givers can untangle the item -- and its subsequent affiliation with a procedure -- from the mass of other items.
9. Count things. Once, we received a monster bill for gauzes. There was no mention of how many were used. This is not to say nurses need to keep track of individual gauzes, but it would have been helpful to understand that so many “packs” of gauzes were opened for the procedure rather than receive a large bill with only the word, “gauzes” attached to it.
10. a. Involve care-givers, put a check a box on the form -- prominently-- to allow consent to allow care-givers to take care of the bill.

b. Involve care-givers, put a space for care-giver contact information, and then contact these care-givers in event of a problem.

c. Involve care-givers, send them a complimentary copy, so if the patient is unable to understand the bill, or loses the bill, the care-giver can respond in a timely manner.

d. Involve care-givers. Allow them access to web-based bills so that if the patient loses the bill, the care-giver can still access the bill and take care of it.

Notes from Robert on Medical Bills

Background: Robert is an adult male with multiple disabilities. The disabilities include visual, motor, and coordination challenges. He is reliant upon a motorized wheelchair. The following observations on medical bills are from Robert.

1. The fine print is too small.
2. Paperwork in general is a problem. Less is better, make the bill specifically about medical issues, not other issues. For example, in one bill he received, he had to check nationality. What does that have to do with health records? Make them separate, and put the information in a separate file so that it can be retrieved independently, and then correlated to patient records if necessary. Adding this information on each application should not be necessary, and is a hardship on the patient and care-giver alike.
3. Standardization would help tremendously, if doctors and hospitals agreed on a general kind of form for input, then the bills too could be standardized, and from that, the patient would not have to relearn a bill from each office, physician, or hospital. He should not have to fill out a different form for each hospital.
4. Involve care-givers; if a bill is late, please try to find out why a bill was late before assuming that a patient has even received the bill. There are instances in which a parent was responsible for my bills but did not respond or pay the bill on time. Had I known, I could have asked a sibling to take care of it.