What Is The Bureau Of Medical Economics?

By Mark Christiansen, BME General Manager

WHAT IS THE BUREAU OF MEDICAL ECONOMICS?
The Bureau of Medical Economics (BME), of Santa Clara County, was formed 60 years ago by the Santa Clara County Medical Association, and became a California corporation in 1950. Its mission is to provide its members with medical billing, collections, and office management services.

BME specializes in medical collections and billing, and has a competitive advantage because of its longstanding and close relationship with the health care community. Due to the diversity of its clients, it has the ability to “pool” accounts that match particular debtors. This means by contracting with BME, physicians, dentists, and other health care providers are able to create a co-op-type relationship—allowing accounts which otherwise might not be economically feasible for follow-up action, such as litigation, to be linked together with other accounts, making capable further collection efforts. No account is too large or too small.

WHO RUNS BME?
BME’s managing director/CEO is William Parrish. Mr. Parrish has served as CEO of SCCMA and BME for over 13 years and continues to advocate on behalf of all SCCMA physician members and their practices.

Mark Christiansen has recently been appointed the general manager of BME, and acts as its attorney, as well. He has been on staff for 13 years, and has 25-years experience working in the collection and subrogation industries.

BME STAFF
The Collection Department staff has an average experience level of 15.5 years in the collection industry (the industry standard is less than one year). BME’s Billing Department staff come from skilled backgrounds which include Lifeguard Insurance Company and El Camino Hospital. Additionally, the Billing Department’s senior billing staff have at least 18-years experience in medical billing and are certified medical coders.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF BME?
BME serves all medical professionals (i.e., physicians, dentists, and therapists), and its current client list contains over 500 individual physicians, 30-plus medical groups, and a major California rural medical clinic non-profit organization.

The collection department’s first goal is debt recovery—recovering the greatest amount for clients, while maintaining the integrity of the physician-patient relationship. BME’s collectors get the job done—they are firm, yet they also understand the nature of the debt they are pursuing (much of it stemming from the necessities of life).

The billing department focuses on accuracy and is able to capitalize on full reimbursement for its clients. It specializes in follow-up, a key component to complete and timely reimbursement. As an added benefit to SCCMA members, BME staff assist with problems involving Medicare and Medi-Cal, as well as other billing and collection questions.

WHAT PRODUCTS/SERVICES DOES BME OFFER?
• BME is a full-service health care collection agency/billing service representing all walks of the health care profession.
• All staff, whether part- or full-time, are regularly trained and tested on HIPAA-compliance, as well as the State and Federal Debt Collection Practice Acts, and its facilities are secure and HIPAA-compliant.
• Collection department recovery rates are twice the national average.
• The billing department focuses on clean claims and diligent follow-up for maximum reimbursement.
• Experienced staff will partner with clients’ office staff to create an environment of efficiency and productivity.
• Offers price incentives, depending on the age and number of accounts to be assigned. Additional price incentives are available for utilizing both the collection and billing services.
• Serves SCCMA members by visiting/evaluating client offices and offering suggestions in the area of office management efficiency.
• Provides discounts for SCCMA members.

WHAT PRODUCTS/SERVICES DOESN’T BME OFFER? AND WHY?
BME doesn’t use predictive or auto-dialers, systems which automatically dial-up a debtor and deliver an automated message and/or route the call to a collector. While many companies use
these devices to minimize costs, a major problem with this tactic is that there is a delay between the time the debtor answers the phone and the time the phone message is delivered or the call is being transferred to the collector. During the delay, in most cases, the recipient has already terminated the call without contact with anyone. There are federal and state laws pertaining to the use of these automated systems, and if the calls are not properly monitored, liability issues may arise.

Another reason BME does not use auto-dialer systems is to prevent unfamiliarity with accounts. With auto-dialer systems, incoming calls are usually routed to the first available collector, not one who is familiar with the individual's account details. There is no substitute for a collector's personal touch, and BME staff dial debtors themselves and make note of each call's outcome. In the event the party doesn't respond to a telephone call, follow-up notices are sent.

**BME doesn't deny access to the general manager.** Some agencies work under the premise that a collector has failed, if the manager is brought into the picture, so contact with the manager is not allowed. Not so, with BME. Most situations can be handled by BME’s experienced staff; however, if a debtor is persistent about speaking to a “higher authority,” this is not denied at BME. And because BME's general manager is also its attorney, any potential claims can be separated from "red herrings." The time to mitigate any problems is at the beginning.

**BME will not use abusive tactics, in order to collect a debt.** Any debt can be discussed and collected by referring to the facts. BME understands that its clients are professionals, and the way in which debt is collected should reflect that standard.

**WHAT IS THE COST OF BME’S PRODUCTS AND SERVICES?**
The main feature of BME's fee structure is there are no hidden costs! Some billing companies promise a lower percentage rate, but charge on the total amounts billed, rather than on accounts receivable. With BME's Collections Department—the client doesn't pay, unless BME collects. No recovery, no fee. Upon collection of principal on an account, BME retains an agreed upon percentage of the recovery as its fee. With BME's Billing Department—a competitive fee strategy is used, based on evaluation of the provider's productivity and current fee profile, to offer fair and competitive pricing. Fees can also be structured on a subscription, for certain types of services.

**WHERE HAS BME BEEN AND WHERE IS IT GOING?**
As BME has been around for 60 years, many things have changed since its inception, however, viability has never been an issue, and isn't today. BME owns its operational headquarters at 700 Empey Way, San Jose, and is ready for changes in the collection industry. By moving forward with newer technologies, such as Web access for clients, greater ability to provide custom reporting, and an ever-advancing database system, BME provides its collection and billing clients with greater real-time access to their patient account information, as well as options regarding practice management systems, and the capability of having a relationship which creates an extension of your office. Whether or not your office management system is in-house, BME's full-time IT-specialist has the expertise to help clients with their connectivity and security needs, enabling them to connect to BME, so BME staff can most efficiently meet their clients' ever-changing needs.

In this era of mergers and acquisitions of various agencies, you need to know with whom you are placing your accounts and reputation. Collection and billing industries in the state of California are not currently regulated by government agencies. This means that almost anyone can claim to be a collection agency or billing company. BME knows the value of its clients and is prepared to serve them for many years to come.

BME's mission statement of providing a membership benefit has not changed since its' beginning. With recent upgrades to its infrastructure, including the latest software and hardware updates, BME is a long way from the days of card files and carbon copies. However, it has not changed the most important ingredient to a good business—its close relationship with clients.

Customer service contacts for both the Billing Department and the Collection Department are available during regular business hours. For more billing information, please contact Yolonda Rubio, billing supervisor, 408/998-5811 ext. 3002. The collection customer contact is Karen Jorgenson, 408/998-5811 ext. 3034.

The Bureau of Medical Economics looks forward to hearing from and working with you, the members of SCCMA, for years to come.

**COMPANY:**
Bureau of Medical Economics (BME)

**SCCMA MEMBER BENEFIT:**
An affiliate of SCCMA, BME has a recovery rate approximately twice the national average. Members receive a discount off the basic rate, based on volume.

**CONTACT:**
For billing information, contact Yolonda Rubio at 408/998-5811 ext. 3002. For collections, contact Karen Jorgenson at 408/998-5811 ext. 3034.