Patient documentation, also known as daily progress SOAP notes, is easy to do. If you use a computerized note system, you can enter and produce detailed dictation quality notes in seconds. So why are the majority of our colleagues NOT keeping accurate and thorough patient documentation? Here is a true life story that everyone should learn from.

Dr. X received a letter from an insurance company requesting the records on 7 patients. This surprised him because he consistently provided quality service. There had never been a complaint filed against him. Each of the involved patients insisted that they never had communicated with the insurance company. Everyone was puzzled. Dr. X submitted the files for review. Weeks passed by and a certified letter from the insurance company arrives demanding that Dr. X refund to the insurance carrier $650,000.00 with interest and penalties added. This was based on Dr. X’s files NOT matching what he billed on those 7 patients, and the insurance company used a process of extrapolation to determine that for the past few years this should apply to every patient Dr. X had treated that was covered by that insurance company. Shortly thereafter, Dr. X received a visit from State Insurance Fraud Investigators, because the insurance carrier had filed fraud charges against Dr. X. The “crime” that Dr. X had committed was having inadequate SOAP documentation. Although Dr. X was able to avoid jail time, he lost his home, his license, his practice and most of his retirement account. His family is devastated. A few years before retirement, and Dr. X needs to find a new profession and source of income. If he had taken the time to properly document the services he provided to his patients, he would still be in practice. He learned the hard way that if it is not written and recorded in the patient file, it is considered as if it were never done.

Our great Chiropractic profession has been under attack by the insurance industry for decades. Claims examiners have discovered that too many of our colleagues have poor or even no documentation for the services they provided. The examiners have turned Chiropractic offices into gold mines for the insurance industry. Examiners demand documentation which we are required to provide, and when that documentation is determined to be inadequate to substantiate what was billed, the insurance company screams fraud and demands a refund. As far as the insurance world is concerned, if you did not write and record it, you never did it.

Very few doctors know what to do when this happens, and even most attorneys do not have the knowledge or experience to deal with this type of situation. The result is that doctors that provided quality care but did not document properly are being put out of business. They are losing their practices and licenses, and more. Do not let this happen to you. Take the steps now to make your SOAP documentation rock solid.

As a precautionary measure, whether it is through friends or your state association, get the names and contact information for those attorneys that specialize in dealing with insurance audits. Some doctors are having one of these specialist attorneys come in to their practices and perform an audit to identify shortcomings that could pose problems with insurance companies. Other doctors are using independent auditing companies for this task. Although it may be more expensive to hire an attorney for this purpose, the attorney gives you an extra layer of protection. Anything that the attorney discovers is protected under attorney/client privilege, is not discoverable by the insurance company, and can not be
used against you. Independent auditing companies are very good, but if an insurance company comes after you, they can subpoena the records of the independent auditor and use that information to harm you.

The insurance industry is demanding an extremely intense level of documentation for everything that is said or done, to or with a patient. The insurance industry has a very powerful lobby with every legislative body. The result is that Federal and State laws, State Board rulings, and court decisions are enforcing the demands of the insurance industry. And if you do not live up to the standards set by insurance and government agencies, then you risk losing your license to practice and everything you own.

Thanks to the insurance industry, there is now a Federal requirement that patient health records be in an electronic format by 2014. Whether or not you want to computerize, Uncle Sam is forcing the issue. So the time has come for you to make sure your SOAP notes are up to par, and to computerize your documentation now if you have not already done so. Waiting until the last minute will only create more problems and challenges when you finally do computerize.

Computerization of SOAP notes empowers you to produce high quality, detailed SOAP notes within seconds. It empowers your staff to be more productive with recalls, collections, and building your practice since most paper filing is eliminated. At the end of the day, as long as you produced your notes in real time, you are finished when the last patient leaves. Your evening becomes relaxation time instead of “homework” time.

Selecting a SOAP Documentation Program

So how do you protect your license and your practice? Make sure you select and purchase a SOAP note program that does what you want it to do. Be sure you get a thorough demonstration of it before you buy. Check into its actual dollar cost since some programs are modular where your quoted price does not include...
all the functions and features you need. Other programs have one price that includes all the features, but may vary based on the number of users that need to simultaneously access the program. And pay close attention to the features because the most expensive program may not give you all the features that less costly systems provide.

- Is the computer SOAP program limited to SOAP notes?
- Does it include narrative reports?
- Does it integrate with billing?
- Can you access it from anywhere with an internet connection?
- Does the SOAP note software integrate with your billing and management program to automatically generate charges, thereby guaranteeing that SOAP and billing match?
- Are letter and document templates included?
- What practice marketing features are built into it?
- Does it include a random text generator so your notes never look canned?
- Is there a substantial verbiage library built into the program allowing you to use it the day it is installed?
- How much training is included with the program?
- How much will it cost to maintain each year?
- What happens when you or your staff needs technical support?
- Should you get one system that includes both documentation and office management?
- Is any special computer hardware required for the program to work?
- Is the price quoted a purchase price, or is it a lease/rental that continues monthly or yearly forever?

Be sure that all the questions are answered to your satisfaction, and please add to this list.

SOAP note documentation software programs are easy to use. They produce daily progress notes that are very thorough and hold up to the scrutiny of insurance examiners. On each follow up visit, the computerized note is generated in a matter of seconds. In order to produce an equivalent note on paper would take from 5 to 15 minutes.

The time has come to get the advantages of computerization, including audit defense, preservation of your license, fraud protection, speed of dictation quality note creation, elimination of paper filing, and integration with office management and billing.

About The Author
Dr. Paul Bindell is a 1975 graduate of Palmer College of Chiropractic, in practice in Rockaway, NJ since 1976. Dr. Bindell is a past Chairman of Public Relations for the Northern (NJ) Counties Chiropractic Society. The Chiropractic Answer produced by Dr. Bindell in the 1980s was a cable television program, a newsletter, and a newspaper column. In 1991 Dr. Bindell and his family began Life Systems Software so that the profession would have reliable computer programs based on real Chiropractic practice. As a Chiropractic computer consultant, Dr Bindell has become an expert in assisting Chiropractors to improve and grow successfully. Numerous articles about computers and Chiropractic have been written by Dr. Bindell and have appeared in several Chiropractic journals. Dr. Bindell is available to speak to your group or organization and can be reached by email at administration@LifeSystemsSoftware.com, or call Life Systems Software at 800-543-3001.