Communicating Lab and Diagnostic Report Results to your Patients

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As a doctor it is your responsibility to communicate effectively with your patients, both during and in between appointments. Communicating lab results or diagnostic test results is crucial for effective patient care. It’s important that your medical practice or hospital has a clear policy for communicating these results in a timely manner.

If you’re having trouble contacting a patient concerning their lab or diagnostic results, MagMutual typically recommends contacting the patient on three separate, and timely occasions; twice with a phone call and message; and once with an e-mail or letter. Take care to document each of your attempts to contact the patient—noting time, date, and method of communication.

While this is a good general rule for practices to follow, each case needs to be considered separately. Depending on the specific circumstances (the patient’s condition, the nature of the test results, and the urgency of the situation, etc.), the contact methods and frequency should be reevaluated and adjusted.

MAG Mutual Risk Management and Patient Safety Consultants invite our policyholders’ questions. If you wish to discuss issues related to this article, or have other questions please call us at 1-800-282-4882, and ask for Risk Management.
Reference: This article was adapted from MagMutual’s risk management / patient safety on-line Frequently Asked Question (FAQ). (FAQ), “How many times should I attempt to notify a patient of their lab or diagnostic test results?” The FAQ may be found at: http://www.magmutual.com/communicating-lab-diagnostic-reports-patients [1].

The information provided in this resource does not constitute legal, medical or any other professional advice, nor does it establish a standard of care. This resource has been created as an aid to you in your practice. The ultimate decision on how to use the information provided rests solely with you, the Policy Owner.

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