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Documenting a Late Entry

One of our members asks: *If I, the physician, prescribe a medication on a Sunday and do not return to the office until Wednesday, what date do I use when I document the phone call on Wednesday when I return to the office?*

This type of entry is referred to as a "late entry." CAP's Risk Management & Patient Safety Department recommends the following guidelines when dealing with a situation like this.

1. Identify the new entry as a late entry.
2. Enter the current date and time. Do not attempt to give the appearance that the entry was made on a previous date or an earlier time. Make sure the late entry is signed.
3. Identify or refer to the date and circumstance for which the late entry or addendum is written.
4. When making a late entry, document as soon as possible. There is no time limit for writing a late entry, however the more time that elapses, the less reliable the entry becomes.

Here is an example of a late entry: *January 9, 2009 - Late Entry: Spoke with Mrs. Smith on Sunday January 6, 2009 regarding continued rash. Prescribed XYZ 10 mg tid (NKA) and advised to call office on Monday if rash not improved.*

The Cooperative of American Physicians, Inc. makes available to members "After-Hour" notepads to help document these kinds of situations. A member physician can write up the phone call and advice on the spot and then tape the note onto the patient's record. Or, the physician can scan the note into the record upon returning to the office. The "After Hours" notepads are available free to members by calling 1-800-252-0555.

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