

June 2013

Dear Clients and Friends:

When that familiar envelope arrives from my health insurer, I know exactly what's inside. Another "Explanation of Benefits." I have the routine down to a few seconds. Open, unfold the form, then look for the line "it is not your responsibility to pay ..."

I often don't take the time to find out what the services were that I'm not supposed to pay for. As long as insurance or Medicare is covering the bill, I'm a happy camper. But now all that is going to change, because medical identity theft is becoming a real threat.

Hospitals are just beginning to look at this issue. In the past, they haven't done much to identify patients, partly because they don't want to violate privacy rights. That's how a fellow named Kenneth Marshall took the identity of Michael Weatherford, who didn't even live in the same state, and racked up \$345,000 in medical bills at Wexner Medical Center in Ohio. This type of fraud totaled \$41 billion in 2012, a 25% jump from 2011. In Weatherford's case, all the trouble started when his driver's license was stolen. That shows how little documentation is needed for someone to pretend they're you.

This creates more than a financial problem. Consider going to a hospital where they pull up the thief's medical records, thinking they're your records. From that point on you could receive the wrong diagnosis, treatment and prescriptions.

The best way to prevent your identity from being stolen is to read the description of services in every explanation of medical benefits. If you don't understand the description or remember a particular service, contact the doctor or hospital to verify its authenticity. I've started paying close attention to my EOB's, and you should do the same.

Regards,



Charles M. Shackelford