

**MEMORIAL HERMANN SURGICAL HOSPITAL FIRST COLONY
POLICY**

POLICY TITLE: Billing and Collections Policy

PUBLICATION DATE: 10/1/2018

VERSION: 1

POLICY PURPOSE:

This Policy establishes reasonable procedures regarding the collection of patient accounts, including actions that may be taken by Memorial Hermann Surgical Hospital First Colony (“MSHFC”) or contracted external collection agencies.

SCOPE:

This policy applies to Memorial Hermann Surgical Hospital First Colony.

POLICY STATEMENT:

1. It is the policy of MSHFC to pursue collection of patient balances from patients who have the ability to pay for services. This policy describes the actions MSHFC may take to collect hospital and/or other charges for services provided to MSHFC patients. The policy also describes the process and time frames associated with those collection activities, the actions MSHFC may take in the event of nonpayment, and the reasonable efforts MSHFC must take to determine if a patient is eligible for Financial Assistance.
2. This policy defines how MSHFC communicates to patients regarding amounts due for services rendered by MSHFC.
3. MSHFC will make reasonable efforts to identify patients who may be eligible for Financial Assistance.
4. This policy also defines circumstances in which MSHFC may write off patient accounts to bad debt and the process to control and monitor write-offs of patient account balances.
5. MSHFC will not engage in Extraordinary Collection Actions as outlined in I.R.C. § 501(r) and its accompanying regulations.

6. The policies and procedures stated herein are intended to comply with the laws and regulations of the state of Texas, I.R.C. § 501(r) and related guidance.
7. Final authority to determine whether MSHFC has made reasonable efforts to determine eligibility for Financial Assistance resides with MSHFC.

TERMS AND DEFINITIONS:

1. *Application*: An application for Financial Assistance to be completed by a patient.
2. *Application Period*: During the Application Period, MSHFC will accept and process an application for Financial Assistance. The Application Period begins on the date the care is provided to the individual and ends on the 240th day after the date of the first billing statement for the care.
3. *Bad Debt Write-off*: An adjustment to a patient account for amounts deemed to be uncollectible, but the patient has the ability to pay the outstanding balance. This determination is based using established collection criteria and is made only after an account has been billed and appropriate collection follow-up efforts have been taken.
4. *Contractual Adjustment*: An adjustment posted to a patient account to reflect the difference between the patient's total charges at established rates and the actual reimbursement expected from third party payers pursuant to lawful regulations or contractual arrangements.
5. *Extraordinary Collection Actions ("ECAs")*: These are collection actions requiring a legal or judicial process, and can also involve other activities such as selling debt to another party or reporting adverse information to credit agencies or bureaus.
MSHFC does not engage in ECAs, nor does it permit its collection vendors to engage in ECAs.
6. *Financial Assistance*: Financial Assistance means assistance offered by MSHFC to patients who meet certain financial and other eligibility criteria as defined in the FAP to help them obtain the financial resources necessary to pay for emergent or medically necessary health care services provided by MSHFC. Eligible patients may include uninsured patients, low income patients, and those patients who have partial coverage but who are unable to pay some or all of the remainder of their medical bills. Financial assistance does not include contractual allowances with insurance companies and other third party health coverage.
7. *Plain Language Summary ("PLS")*: A plain summary of the FAP includes: (a) a brief description of the eligibility requirements and assistance offered; (b) a listing of the website and physical locations where Financial Assistance applications may be

obtained; (c) instructions on how to obtain a free paper copy of the FAP; (5) contact information for assistance with the application process; (6) availability of language translations of the FAP and related documents; and (7) a statement confirming that patients who are determined to be eligible for Financial Assistance will be charged no more than amounts generally billed for emergency or medically necessary services.

8. *Reasonable Efforts*: MSHFC will make reasonable efforts to provide notification to the patient about MSHFC's FAP by offering the Plain Language Summary of the FAP to all patients at the earliest practical time of service. In addition, MSHFC will take the following steps to inform patients about MSHFC's FAP:
 - a. *Incomplete Applications*: If the patient and/or family submit an incomplete application, then MSHFC will provide a written notification that describes what additional information or documentation is needed.
 - b. *Completed Applications*: If the patient and/or patient's family member submits a complete Financial Assistance application, MSHFC will provide written notification that documents a determination on whether a patient is eligible for Financial Assistance in a timely matter and notifies the patient in writing of the determination (including, if applicable, the assistance for which the patient is eligible) and the basis for this determination. This notification will also include the Financial Assistance percentage amount (for approved applications) or reason(s) for denial, and expected payment from the patient and/or family where applicable. The patient and/or family will continue to receive statements during the evaluation of a completed application.
 - c. *Patient Statements*: MSHFC will send a series of statements describing the patient's account and amount due. Patient statements will include a request that the patient is responsible to inform MSHFC of any available health insurance coverage, a notice of MSHFC's FAP, a telephone number to request Financial Assistance, and the website address where FAP documents can be obtained.
 - d. *MSHFC Website*: MSHFC's websites will post notice in a prominent place that Financial Assistance is available, with an explanation of the Financial Assistance application process. MSHFC will post the FAP with a list of providers who are covered and not covered under the FAP, plain language summary, Financial Assistance application, and Billing and Collections Policy on the MSHFC website:
<http://www.memorialhermannFirstColony.com/financial-assistance-program/>. MSHFC will have free paper copies of these documents

available upon request in the emergency department and registration areas.

REVIEW CRITERIA:

1. *Communications with Patient:* Early in the revenue cycle process, patients shall receive written or verbal communications regarding their outstanding balance, as well as MSHFC's payment expectations. All communications with the patient will include a notice about the availability of the FAP, a telephone number to call for additional information, and the website address where copies of the FAP and related documents can be obtained. MSHFC will offer a copy of the Plain Language Summary of the FAP to all patients.
 - a. Uninsured patients are expected to cooperate with MSHFC in its efforts to identify funding sources through federal and state programs to cover their health care expenses. Uninsured patients will receive a monthly statement which describes the FAP and their outstanding balance for up to 150 days post the service date. If a patient fails to enter into a payment plan or resolve their outstanding balance MSHFC will evaluate placement of the account with a third party collection agency.
 - b. Insured patients are expected to cooperate with MSHFC in its efforts to receive payments from the patient's insurance carrier. A patient should also understand that when MSHFC bills the patient's insurance carrier it is a courtesy and does not remove the patient's financial responsibility to make payment for services provided by MSHFC. Therefore, at times MSHFC will require that a patient get involved with their insurance carrier to resolve payment delays or resolve other administrative matters preventing payment for service. Once MSHFC receives payment for services and appropriate contractual adjustments have been applied to the account the patient will receive a monthly statement which describes the FAP and their outstanding balance for up to 120 days following the insurance carrier's payment. If a patient fails to enter into a payment plan or resolve their outstanding balance MSHFC will evaluate placement of the account with a third party collection agency.
2. *Financial Assistance:* It is the practice of MSHFC to assist patients in securing reimbursement from available third party resources. Financial counseling will be provided to help patients identify available federal or state healthcare coverage programs which may be available to them, as well as to determine eligibility under the FAP. Collection activity will be placed on hold pending the outcome of these determinations, but patient statements will continue to be sent. For Financial Assistance through MSHFC, the criteria used in calculating the amount of the discount, the measures MSHFC will take to widely publicize the FAP within the community served by MSHFC, the process used by MSHFC to determine

Financial Assistance eligibility, and the application process are described in detail in the **MHSHFC [Financial Assistance Policy](#)**

3. *Payment Plans*: MHSHFC offers interest-free, extended payment plans to patients who anticipate difficulty in paying their bill. Patients can enter a payment plan through speaking with registration personnel on date of service, or speaking with a financial counselor at any time prior to or after the date of service. Patients will be required to make at least a monthly payment to maintain an active payment plan. If a patient fails to make a scheduled payment the patient will be considered delinquent on their promise to pay their outstanding account balance. Reasonable effort will be made to reestablish the patient payment plan following the first delinquent payment. If a patient fails to reestablish a payment plan and/or becomes delinquent for a second time MHSHFC will place the account with a third party collection agency. Once placed with a third party collection agency the patient will be required to work directly with the third party agency to resolve their outstanding balance. The patient will not be eligible to enter into another payment plan with MHSHFC.
4. *Collection activities in Event of Non-payment*: In the event of non-payment, various collection activities will be used based on account balance, third party payer reimbursement liability, patient's eligibility for governmental funding or Financial Assistance, patient cooperation, payment or bad debt history, and/or inability to locate the patient. Collection activities may include appeal of a third party payer denial; follow-up communications with the third party payer; statements, letters, and telephone calls to the patient offering Financial Assistance and/or requesting payment; and final notification to the patient or guarantor that the account is delinquent and subject to being placed with a collection agency no earlier than 120 days from the date of the first statement notifying the patient of the patient balance owed, unless the patient has defaulted on an agreed-upon payment plan per item 3 above. Legal action may also be initiated by MHSHFC against a third party responsible (third party liability) for delinquent payment of the account.
5. *Bad debt*: Accounts may be written off to bad debt only after the account has been final billed to available third party payer(s) and to the patient/guarantor, established billing and follow-up communications have occurred, reasonable efforts have been made to inform the patient of the availability of Financial Assistance, payment timeframes have expired, and the account has been determined to be uncollectible.
6. *External Collection Actions*: To ensure that only appropriate accounts are written off to bad debt, and only after billing and collection efforts have been taken, including appropriate referral to an external firm for collection, the Patient Business Office team will review bad debt write-offs for approval. Utilizing established collection criteria and approved write-off authorization limits (see MHSHFC **[Patient Business Service Adjustment Policy](#)**), the Business Office Manager can either approve the

write-off or recommend appropriate action to the Hospital Chief Financial Officer. Accounts may also be transferred automatically to an external firm for collection by the patient accounting system, based on established payer, balance, and payment activity parameters.

7. *Implementation:* It is the responsibility of the MSHFC Patient Business Office and Central Billing Office (CBO) to implement this policy and develop department specific operating procedures.

CROSS-REFERENCES:

- A. Patient Transfer Policy (EMTALA and Texas Transfer Act Compliance)
- B. Financial Assistance Policy
- C. Financial Assistance Plain Language Summary
- D. Financial Assistance Application