

WAC 246-453-020 Uniform procedures for the identification of indigent persons. For the purpose of identifying those patients that will be classified as indigent persons, all hospitals shall adopt and implement the following procedures:

(1) The initiation of collection efforts directed at the responsible party shall be precluded pending an initial determination of sponsorship status, provided that the responsible party is cooperative with the hospital's efforts to reach an initial determination of sponsorship status;

(a) Collection efforts shall include any demand for payment or transmission of account documents or information which is not clearly identified as being intended solely for the purpose of transmitting information to the responsible party;

(b) The initial determination of sponsorship status shall be completed at the time of admission or as soon as possible following the initiation of services to the patient;

(c) If the initial determination of sponsorship status indicates that the responsible party may meet the criteria for classification as an indigent person, as described in WAC 246-453-040, collection efforts directed at the responsible party will be precluded pending a final determination of that classification, provided that the responsible party is cooperative with the hospital's reasonable efforts to reach a final determination of sponsorship status;

(d) During the pendency of the initial determination of sponsorship status and/or the final determination of the applicability of indigent person criteria, hospitals may pursue reimbursement from any third-party coverage that may be identified to the hospital;

(e) The requirements of this subsection shall not apply to clinics operated by disproportionate share hospitals, as defined and identified by the department of social and health services, medical assistance services, provided that patients are advised of the availability of charity care at the time that services are provided and when presented with a request for payment.

(2) Notice shall be made publicly available that charges for services provided to those persons meeting the criteria established within WAC 246-453-040 may be waived or reduced.

(3) Any responsible party who has been initially determined to meet the criteria identified within WAC 246-453-040 shall be provided with at least fourteen calendar days or such time as the person's medical condition may require, or such time as may reasonably be necessary to secure and to present documentation as described within WAC 246-453-030 prior to receiving a final determination of sponsorship status.

(4) Hospitals must make every reasonable effort to determine the existence or nonexistence of third-party sponsorship that might cover in full or in part the charges for services provided to each patient.

(5) Hospitals may require potential indigent persons to use an application process attesting to the accuracy of the information provided to the hospital for purposes of determining the person's qualification for charity care sponsorship. Hospitals may not impose application procedures for charity care sponsorship which place an unreasonable burden upon the responsible party, taking into account any physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory deficiencies or language barriers which may hinder the responsible party's capability of complying with the application procedures. The failure of a responsible party to reasonably complete appropriate application procedures shall

be sufficient grounds for the hospital to initiate collection efforts directed at the patient.

(6) Hospitals may not require deposits from those responsible parties meeting the criteria identified within WAC 246-453-040 (1) or (2), as indicated through an initial determination of sponsorship status.

(7) Hospitals must notify persons applying for charity care sponsorship of their final determination of sponsorship status within fourteen calendar days of receiving information in accordance with WAC 246-453-030; such notification must include a determination of the amount for which the responsible party will be held financially accountable.

(8) In the event that the hospital denies the responsible party's application for charity care sponsorship, the hospital must notify the responsible party of the denial and the basis for that denial.

(9) All responsible parties denied charity care sponsorship under WAC 246-453-040 (1) or (2) shall be provided with, and notified of, an appeals procedure that enables them to correct any deficiencies in documentation or request review of the denial and results in review of the determination by the hospital's chief financial officer or equivalent.

(a) Responsible parties shall be notified that they have thirty calendar days within which to request an appeal of the final determination of sponsorship status. Within the first fourteen days of this period, the hospital may not refer the account at issue to an external collection agency. After the fourteen day period, if no appeal has been filed, the hospital may initiate collection activities.

(b) If the hospital has initiated collection activities and discovers an appeal has been filed, they shall cease collection efforts until the appeal is finalized.

(c) In the event that the hospital's final decision upon appeal affirms the previous denial of charity care designation under the criteria described in WAC 246-453-040 (1) or (2), the responsible party and the department of health shall be notified in writing of the decision and the basis for the decision, and the department of health shall be provided with copies of documentation upon which the decision was based.

(d) The department will review the instances of denials of charity care. In the event of an inappropriate denial of charity care, the department may seek penalties as provided in RCW 70.170.070.

(10) Hospitals should make every reasonable effort to reach initial and final determinations of charity care designation in a timely manner; however, hospitals shall make those designations at any time upon learning of facts or receiving documentation, as described in WAC 246-453-030, indicating that the responsible party's income is equal to or below two hundred percent of the federal poverty standard as adjusted for family size. The timing of reaching a final determination of charity care status shall have no bearing on the identification of charity care deductions from revenue as distinct from bad debts.

(11) In the event that a responsible party pays a portion or all of the charges related to appropriate hospital-based medical care services, and is subsequently found to have met the charity care criteria at the time that services were provided, any payments in excess of the amount determined to be appropriate in accordance with WAC 246-453-040 shall be refunded to the patient within thirty days of achieving the charity care designation.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 70.170.060. WSR 91-05-048 (Order 142), § 246-453-020, filed 2/14/91, effective 3/17/91.]