

Why do I have to answer those “###! 8” Queries?

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Most, if not all of you, who practice inpatient medicine, will at some point or another receive a query in your Cerner inbox from a Clinical Documentation Improvement (CDI) specialist seeking documentation clarification about a patient you cared for. Most of you will reply in a timely manner and the issue will be closed. However, some of you tend to either ignore the query or simply delete it. Please, do not do that and let me further explain why.

Queries are an important aspect of making sure the documentation in the medical record translates appropriately to the correct coding and billing so Children's can receive the appropriate reimbursement for the care and services that are provided to our patients. In some cases, additional documentation is needed to comply with the new ICD 10 requirements (e.g. Pneumonia or Community Acquired Pneumonia is no longer sufficient. Now the type of pneumonia – such as bacterial or viral, as well as the specific organism, if known – needs to be documented). In other cases, it may simply not be clear what a clinician meant to indicate (e.g. “gram negative organisms in urine – will treat with antibiotics”. Was this a UTI, pyelonephritis, ...?).

Finally, in some cases, a diagnosis may have been suggested or implied in the documentation. However, if it is not specifically stated, the CDI specialist cannot interpret the clinician's intent (e.g. “pt. with significant difficulty breathing requiring 8 liters of oxygen to keep saturations > 90%”. Does this mean the patient was in acute respiratory failure with hypoxia?).

When the documentation is unclear, the CDI Specialist will send a query to the clinician in the Cerner message center seeking clarification of the documentation. They will give you examples of what could be documented, but can't tell you what to document. That is up to you as the clinician to decide.

Responding to queries is also important because it allows Children's to capture all possible diagnoses that the patient had and/or is being treated for, which provides an appropriate reflection of the Severity of Illness. This in turn directly impacts how much Children's can bill for the services provided. Query response can also positively affect the Case Mix Index for our hospital which helps to determine how ill our patients are and why their lengths of stay may be longer than a patient with a similar diagnosis cared for at another institution.

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Please, if you receive a query, answer it as quickly and completely as possible. I promise you, they don't go away. If you don't respond, I will follow up with a kindly written reminder as to the importance of replying. We are looking at options of making the process easier in the future – such as replying directly in the message query, rather than having to add an addendum to an existing note and will let you know when this is ready to go. Thank you for your assistance.