



Medical Coding

Essential guidelines & tips to core coding procedures & practices, including: ICD-10-CM, CPT-4 & HCPCS Level II

General Coding & Legal Guidelines

Medical Care + Preventative Care = Health Care

- Health care is a comprehensive system that focuses on establishing and maintaining each individual's good health
- Third-party payer is the person or organization not involved in the health care relationship except for their obligation to pay for the encounter and services involved
 - Party #1: The health care provider
 - Party #2: The patient
 - Party #3: The insurance carrier (third-party payer)
- ICD-10-CM stands for International Classification of Diseases, 10th Revision, Clinical Modification
- ICD-10-CM used to code diagnoses
- ICD-10-PCS contains codes used to bill for inpatient (hospital) procedures
- CPT stands for Current Procedural Terminology, and is used to code procedures
- HCPCS stands for Health Care Common Procedural Coding System
- HCPCS Level II is a book containing codes used to bill for dental procedures, durable medical equipment (DME), drugs, and other services and supplies; codes are used to report services, procedures, and supplies not included in CPT
 - Advanced Life Support (ALS) is a level of service provided by ambulance personnel
 - DMEPOS: Durable Medical Equipment, Prosthetic, and Orthotic Supplies
- Durable Medical Equipment (DME): medical supplies that either can be used by several individuals or that last a long time, such as a cane or a wheelchair
- Outpatient: an individual provided health care services without an overnight stay in the facility
- Inpatient: an individual staying overnight in an acute-care or other health care facility

Legal Guidelines

- HIPAA: Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, a federal law

- HIPAA's Privacy Rule is about protecting the patient's privacy; this law simply assures each and every person coming to any health care facility that his/her personal and private information will be protected and treated with respect
- Coding for coverage means that a code is changed to fit what the insurance company will pay for rather than accurately reflecting the procedure that was performed
- Medical necessity (medically necessary) is the determination that the provider was acting according to standard practices in providing the procedure for an individual with this diagnosis; use of ICD-10-CM Diagnosis Codes establishes a medical reason (medical necessity) for providing the services and/or procedures claimed
- Mutually exclusive codes report conditions that cannot be in the same patient at the same time
- Supporting documentation refers to the paperwork in the patient's file that corroborates the codes presented on the claim form for that particular encounter
- Unbundling means that individual parts of a specific procedure were used rather than a combination or bundle that includes all those components
- Upcoding means that a code is used on a claim form indicating a higher level of service than was actually performed

Rules of Legal & Ethical Coding

- The codes indicated on the claim form **must represent** the services actually performed, and are supported by the notes and other documentation in the patient's health record
- Coding for coverage—using codes not chosen for the best, most accurate code available, but rather, with regard to what procedures the insurance company will pay for (i.e., "cover")—is dishonest and is considered **fraud**
- Upcoding—using a code that indicates that a higher level of service was provided than was actually performed—is unethical and **illegal**
- Submitting a claim for services that have already been billed for is called **double billing** and constitutes **fraud**
- Unbundling—using individual (also known as

- component) service codes when a comprehensive or combination (bundle) code is available—is **illegal**
- The use of mutually exclusive codes—codes identified as not permitted to be used on the same claim form—is considered **unethical**
- Separating codes relating to a single encounter and placing them on several claim forms over the course of several days is **not legal or ethical**

Definitions

TIP

4 Steps to Accurate Coding

1. Read through the Supplement and the physician's notes
2. Abstract physician's notes
3. Query the health care provider if details are missing or unclear
4. Code the diagnosis(s)
5. Code the procedure(s)
6. Link every procedure code to at least one diagnosis code to document medical necessity



Methods of Administering Medications

- IA Intra-arterial (into the artery)
- ID Intradermal (skin test)
- IM Intramuscular (into the muscle)
- INH Inhaled solutions (breathed in by the patient)
- IO Intraosseous (into the bone)
- IP Intraperitoneal (into the abdominal wall)
- IT Intrathecal (into spinal fluid)
- IV Intravenous (into the vein)
- ORAL Orally (by mouth)
- OTH Other—includes suppositories, catheter injections, etc.
- SC Subcutaneous (below the surface of the skin)
- SubQ SubQ
- VAR Venous—includes administration into joints, cavities, tissues, or topical applications

TIP If you don't know, you don't code! Don't assume! Don't guess! Don't suppose!

CODING TIPS	
ABC123	Never code out of the Alphabetical Index!
Back Coding	After coding a patient's encounter from the physician's notes, make certain you back code to double-check your work; wait a little while, then go into the ICD-10-CM Tabular List and into the CPT numerical listing, and look up the codes you found earlier; match the descriptions you see to the key words from the physician's notes; this may help you find any errors
CC	Chief Complaint: concise statement about the reason for the encounter
Medical Record Documentation	The records for each patient encounter should include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reason for encounter and relevant history, physical exam findings, and prior diagnostic test results • Assessment, clinical impressions, and/or diagnosis • Plan for care • Date and legible identity of observer or provider
Who – The Patient	• Why did the patient come to see the provider?
Why – Diagnosis Code(s)	• What did the provider do in response to the why?
What – Procedure Code(s)	• How did the injury or poisoning happen?
How – External Cause Codes	• Where did it happen?

- CLIA: Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments; federal legislation created for the monitoring and regulation of clinical procedures
- EPSDT: Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment services; a Medicaid preventive health program for children (under 21 years of age)
- HPSA: Health Professional Shortage Area
- Locum Tenens: a physician that fills in, temporarily, for another physician

TIP • Use a medical dictionary to ensure you know what the terms mean
• Always check for symbols and notations to guide you to the correct code

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M Woodhall



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