

**HANDBOOK**  
**FOR**  
**CODING GUIDELINES**

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**HEALTH INFORMATION MANAGEMENT**

**Department of Veterans Affairs**

## Table of Contents

<b>I.</b>	<b>POLICY .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>II.</b>	<b>SCOPE .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>III.</b>	<b>PURPOSE.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>IV.</b>	<b>STANDARDS OF ETHICAL CODING .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>V.</b>	<b>DEFINITIONS.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>VI.</b>	<b>INPATIENT CODING GUIDELINES .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>VII.</b>	<b>OUTPATIENT CODING GUIDELINES .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>VIII.</b>	<b>SPECIFIC CODING PROCEDURES .....</b>	<b>17</b>
	A. Ancillary Services .....	17
	B. Diagnostic Testing .....	17
	C. Emergency Room Visits .....	18
	D. Face to Face Encounters .....	19
	E. Interventional Radiology: Non-Coronary Procedures .....	19
	F. Laboratory .....	21
	G. Non-Physician Extenders: "Incident to" .....	22
	H. Nurse Visits .....	22
	I. Observation Patients .....	22
	J. Pathology Services .....	24
	K. Radiology Services .....	24
	L. Teaching Physician and Resident Requirements: .....	24
	M. Telemedicine: .....	25
<b>IX.</b>	<b>EVALUATION AND MANAGEMENT CODING: (1997 GUIDELINES).....</b>	<b>26</b>
	A. New Patient .....	26
	B. Established Patient .....	26
	C. Consultation vs. Referral Services .....	27
	D. Office Visit and Ambulatory Procedure .....	28
	E. Pre and Post-Operative Consultations and Follow-Up Care .....	28
	F. Care Plan Oversight .....	28
	G. Concurrent Care .....	28
	H. Team Conferences/Case Management .....	29
	I. Preventive Medicine Services .....	29
	J. Prolonged Physician Services .....	30
	K. Telephone Contacts .....	30
	L. Patient Transport .....	30

<b>X. PROFESSIONAL COMPONENT CODING GUIDELINES FOR INPATIENT STAYS .....</b>	<b>31</b>
A. Admission .....	31
B. Anesthesia.....	31
C. Attending Visits .....	32
D. Consultations.....	32
E. Critical Care Admissions .....	33
F. Deaths .....	34
G. Transfer/Discharge Codes .....	34
 <b>XI. SURGERY CODING GUIDELINES .....</b>	 <b>34</b>
A. Ancillary Services .....	34
B. Assistant at Surgery.....	34
C. Co-Surgery .....	35
D. Follow-up Visits to a Non-surgeon .....	35
E. History and Physical.....	35
F. Global Surgical Package .....	35
G. Multiple Procedures .....	36
H. Office Visit and Ambulatory Procedure.....	37
I. Pre/Post-Op Consultations and Follow-up.....	37
J. Surgical Trays .....	37
K. Suture Removal .....	37
L. Team Surgery.....	37
M. Visits in Conjunction with Ambulatory Surgery .....	37
 <b>XII. CODING GUIDELINES FOR OTHER PROFESSIONALS.....</b>	 <b>37</b>
A. Audiologists .....	37
B. Chaplains.....	38
C. Compensated Work Therapy Services (CWTS) .....	38
D. Dental.....	38
E. Home Health .....	38
F. Hospice .....	41
G. Mental Health Services .....	41
H. Optometrists/Ophthalmologists .....	42
I. Pharmacists.....	43
J. Rehabilitation (OT, PT) .....	43
K. Social Workers.....	44
L. Speech Pathology .....	44
 <b>XIII. SPECIAL SCREENING/VHA PROGRAMS CODING GUIDELINES .....</b>	 <b>45</b>
A. Blood Pressure Screening .....	45
B. Compensation and Pension Exams .....	45
C. Computer Data Analysis/Medical Decision-Making .....	46
D. AIDS/HIV+.....	46
E. Injection Codes .....	46
F. Military Sexual Trauma (MST) .....	47
G. Persian Gulf War Syndrome .....	47
H. PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) .....	47
I. Respite Care.....	47
J. Spinal Cord Injuries.....	47
K. Stroke Patients.....	47

<b>XIV.</b>	<b>DIAGNOSIS/PROCEDURAL SPECIFIC CODING GUIDELINES.....</b>	<b>48</b>
A.	Anthrax.....	48
B.	Asthma.....	48
C.	Cardiac Catheterization.....	48
D.	Diabetes Mellitus.....	49
E.	Health and Behavioral Assessments.....	49
E.	Outpatient Dialysis.....	50
F.	Inpatient Dialysis.....	50
G.	Malignant Lesions.....	50
H.	Pain Management.....	51
I.	Tobacco.....	51
<b>XV.</b>	<b>CODING GUIDELINES BY BODY SYSTEM .....</b>	<b>51</b>
A.	Cardiovascular System - Arteriograms.....	51
B.	Cardiovascular System - Miscellaneous.....	52
C.	Digestive System - Endoscopies.....	52
D.	Digestive System - Hemorrhoidectomy/Fissurectomy.....	53
E.	Digestive System -Miscellaneous.....	53
F.	Female Genital System - Laparoscopy/Hysteroscopy.....	53
G.	Female Genital System - Miscellaneous.....	54
H.	Integumentary System - Removal of Lesions.....	54
I.	Integumentary System - Skin Grafts.....	56
J.	Integumentary System - Breast Lesions.....	57
K.	Integumentary System - Miscellaneous.....	57
L.	Male Genital System.....	57
M.	Musculoskeletal System - Fracture-Dislocation.....	58
N.	Musculoskeletal - Bone Grafts and Biopsies.....	59
O.	Musculoskeletal System - Miscellaneous.....	59
P.	Musculoskeletal System - Arthroscopies.....	60
Q.	Nervous System.....	60
R.	Ophthalmologic System - Cataracts.....	60
S.	Ophthalmologic System - Strabismus Surgery.....	61
T.	Ophthalmologic System -Miscellaneous.....	62
U.	Respiratory System -Sinus Surgeries.....	63
V.	Respiratory System - Miscellaneous.....	63
W.	Urinary System.....	64
X.	Urinary System - Ureter.....	64
Y.	Urinary System - Cystoscopy, Urethroscopy and Cystourethroscopy.....	64
Z.	Urinary System - Transurethral Surgery (Urethra and Bladder).....	65
AA.	Urinary System - Lithotripsy.....	65
BB.	Urinary System - Urodynamics.....	65

**ATTACHMENTS:**

- Attachment A: Modifiers – CPT
- Attachment B: Modifiers – HCPCS
- Attachment C: Evaluation and Management Services Table
- Attachment D: Essential Coding Resources
- Attachment E: Coding Websites

## **HANDBOOK FOR CODING GUIDELINES**

### **I. POLICY**

To establish clear, standard data collecting guidelines for coding and documenting all levels of patient care in all sites of service, e.g., inpatient, outpatient, life support unit, ambulatory surgery, home health, etc. The development and use of coding guidelines will be in accordance with the highest standards for accurate abstracting and coding of health information throughout the Department of Veterans Affairs.

### **II. SCOPE**

Complete and accurate diagnostic and procedural coded data are necessary for research, epidemiology, outcomes and statistical analysis, financial and strategic planning, reimbursement, evaluation of quality of care, and communication to support the patient's treatment. Diagnoses and procedures will be coded utilizing the International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision, Clinical Modification (ICD-9-CM); Current Procedural Terminology, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition (CPT-4); the HCFA Common Procedural Coding System (HCPCS); and/or other classification systems that may be required such as Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM- IV).

### **III. PURPOSE**

To ensure minimal variation in coding practices; accuracy, integrity, and quality patient data; and improve the quality of the documentation within the body of the medical record to support code assignment.

#### IV. STANDARDS OF ETHICAL CODING

The Official Coding Guidelines, published by the Cooperating Parties (American Hospital Association, American Health Information Management Association, Health Care Financing Administration, and the National Center for Health Statistics), should be followed in all facilities regardless of payment source.

- A. Diagnoses that are present on admission or diagnoses and procedures that occur during the current encounter are to be abstracted after a thorough review of the entire medical record. Those diagnoses not applicable to the current encounter should not be abstracted.
- B. Selection of the principal diagnosis and principal procedure, along with other diagnoses and procedures, must meet the definitions of the Uniform Hospital Discharge Data Set (UHDDS).
  - 1. The principal diagnosis is defined in the UHDDS as, “that condition established after study to be chiefly responsible for occasioning the admission of the patient to the hospital care.
  - 2. In accordance with UHDDS definitions, all significant procedures are to be reported.
    - (a) A significant procedure is one that is surgical in nature, or carries a procedural risk, or carries an anesthetic risk, or requires specialized training.
    - (b) When more than one procedure is reported, the principal procedure is to be designated. In determining which of several procedures is principal, the following criteria apply:
      - (1) The principal procedure is one that was performed for definitive treatment rather than one performed for diagnostic or exploratory purposes, or was necessary to take care of a complication.
      - (2) If there appears to be two procedures that are principal, then the one most related to the principal diagnosis should be selected as the principal procedure.
- C. Assessment must be made of the documentation in the chart to ensure that it is adequate and appropriate to support the diagnoses and procedures selected to be abstracted.
- D. Medical record coders should use their skills, their knowledge of ICD-9-CM, CPT, and HCPCS, and any available resources to select diagnostic and procedural codes.
- E. Medical record coders should not change codes or narrative of codes so that the meanings are misrepresented. Nor should diagnoses or procedures be included or excluded because the payment will be affected. Statistical clinical data is an important result of coding, and maintaining the integrity of a quality database should be a conscientious goal.
- F. Physicians should be consulted for clarification when there is conflicting or ambiguous documentation in the chart.
- G. The medical record coder is a member of the Healthcare team and, as such, should assist physicians who are unfamiliar with ICD-9-CM, CPT or DRG methodology by suggesting resequencing or inclusion of diagnoses or procedures when needed to more accurately reflect the occurrence of events during the encounter.
- H. The medical record coder is expected to strive for the optimal payment to which the facility is legally entitled, but it is unethical and illegal to maximize payment by means that contradicts regulatory guidelines.

*(Reference: AHIMA Standards of Ethical Coding)*

**STATEMENT OF ANNUAL AGREEMENT**

It is highly suggested that every employee, in addition to contracted consultants and independent contractors (such as outsourced coding staff), involved in the coding function should be asked, initially at the time of employment and annually thereafter, to sign and date the following statement affixed to a copy of the above Standards of Ethical Coding:

I have read and understand these Standards of Ethical Coding and agree to abide by them at all times. If at any time I believe I have reason to suspect that one of these standards has been violated, either by an internal or external entity, I will report this incident according to the organization's internal reporting policy.	
_____	_____
Employee Signature	Date

**Note:** The signed copy of the Standards of Ethical Coding should be kept in the employee's personnel file within the department.

**V. DEFINITIONS**

- A. **Ambulatory Care:** All types of health services provided on an outpatient basis, in contrast to services provided in the home or to persons who are hospitalized. The term ambulatory care usually implies that the patient has come to a location other than his home to receive care or services and has departed the same day. Ambulatory care services are often referred to as outpatient services.
- B. **Ancillary Services:** Those services other than room, board, medical, and nursing services, such as laboratory, radiology, pharmacy, and therapy services that are provided to patients in the course of care. An ancillary service does not include the exercise of independent medical judgment in the overall diagnosing, evaluating and/or treating the patient's conditions. An ancillary service is usually the result of an encounter.
- C. **CMS:** Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) is a Federal agency within the Department of Health and Human Services that administers all aspects of Medicare, Medicaid and Child Health Insurance Programs. This agency was formerly named Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA).
- D. **Coding:** The process of assigning a number (alpha, numeric, or a combination of both) from a recognized and approved coding classification system that properly identifies and defines medical services, procedures and diagnoses.
- E. **Correct Coding Initiative:** Definitions by Medicare of procedures that cannot be reported together because 1) they are considered bundled because it is the standard of care, violates the separate procedure CPT rule, or payment is specifically prohibited, or 2) the procedures are mutually exclusive because one is more extensive, the codes contain a definition of with and without an additional service or codes are in the same family.
- F. **CPT:** Current Procedural Terminology, 4th Edition, published by the American Medical Association (AMA). A listing of descriptive terms and identifying codes for reporting medical services and procedures performed by physicians (or under the supervision of a physician). The purpose of the terminology is to provide a uniform language that will accurately describe medical, surgical, and diagnostic services, and will thereby provide an effective means for reliable nationwide communication among physicians, patients, and third parties.

- G. **Diagnosis:** The identity of a medical condition, cause or disease.
- H. **DRG:** A method of dividing hospital patients into clinically coherent Diagnostic Related Groups based on the consumption of resources. Patients are assigned to the groups based on their principal diagnosis (the reason for admission, determined after study), secondary diagnosis, procedures performed and the patient's age, sex, and discharge status. These groups form the basis of one payment methodology for inpatient care.
- I. **Down Coding:** A process used by insurance carriers to change the procedure code submitted to one of a lower Value. Insurance claims examiners are trained to match codes and descriptions. If they don't match, the claims examiner has an opportunity to substitute a code with a lower Value, which could mean lower reimbursement. Procedure code and procedure description mismatch, and diagnosis code not supporting the level of care are the two most common opportunities for insurance carrier to down code.
- J. **DSS Identifier:** Decision Support System (DDS) is a new VHA term that was effective on October 1, 1996 which characterizes VHA Ambulatory Care Clinics by a six-character descriptor. A primary stop code and a secondary stop code compose the DSS Identifier. DSS Identifiers are also known as stop codes. The DSS Identifiers assist VA medical centers in defining outpatient production units, which are critical for costing outpatient VHA work.
- K. **E-Code:** Code describing the external cause of an injury. E-codes cover an extensive range of mishaps, such as auto accidents, train wrecks, and even poisoning.
- L. **Elective Surgery:** Surgery which need not be performed on an emergency basis, because reasonable delay will not affect the outcome of surgery unfavorably. Such surgery is usually necessary and may be major.
- M. **E&M Code:** A subsection of CPT codes entitled Evaluation & Management codes introduced in 1992 to classify physician services. These non-technical services are provided by most physicians for the purpose of diagnosing and treating diseases, counseling and evaluating patients.
- N. **Encounter:** An encounter is an instance of direct, usually face-to-face, interaction or contact, regardless of the setting, between a patient and a practitioner vested with primary responsibility for diagnosing, evaluation and/or treating the patient's condition or providing social work services. VHA Directive 2002-023 dated April 12, 2002 states that only face-to-face and telephone contacts count as encounters for the purposes of coding and ambulatory data capture. Document non face-to-face encounters with clinical significance as a Historical Note in CPRS. Historical notes do not generate workload. Encounters do not include ancillary service visits, nor do activities such as, but not limited to, the taking of vital signs incidental to an encounter for a practitioner visit. A patient may have multiple encounters per visit. Other activities and efforts made by clinicians and staff on behalf of patients are considered part of the pre or post encounter and will not be captured by CPT code.
- O. **Event Capture:** Software package, in addition to Patient Care Encounter, utilized by VHA to capture workload.
- P. **Facility:** A facility includes all services performed under the jurisdiction or umbrella of the three digit level VHA facility code to include the Medical Center, SNF, CBOCs, CORF, Mental Health, Home Health, Domiciliary, etc..
- Q. **Fraud and Abuse:** Fraud is the act of intentionally submitting false information (or omitting true information) in order to obtain payment from an insurance company or Medicare. Abuse occurs when a provider unintentionally submits false information, but should have known better had the provider been familiar with the Medicare manual or updates from the Fiscal Intermediary.
- R. **HCFA:** Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA), renamed Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), is a Federal agency within the Department of Health and Human Services that administers all aspects of Medicare, Medicaid and Child Health Insurance Programs.

- S. **HCPCS:** Healthcare Common Procedural Coding System (HCPCS) is a coding system developed by HCFA to standardize coding systems used to process Medicare claims on a national basis. The HCPCS coding system is used to bill primarily for supplies, materials and injections. It is also used to bill for certain procedures and services that are not defined in CPT. HCPCS is a three level coding system which incorporates CPT, national and local level codes. HCPCS Level I is CPT codes. HCPCS Level II national codes report additional medical services and supplies. HCPCS Level III codes are assigned and maintained by individual state Medicare carriers. Level III codes may not be used for medical reimbursement reporting after October 16, 2002.
- T. **ICD-9-CM:** A nomenclature developed by the World Health Organization and modified for use within the United States to classify morbidity and mortality information for statistical purposes, and for the indexing of hospital records by disease and operations for data storage and retrieval.
- U. **Inpatient:** A patient who has been admitted to a hospital or other health facility for the purpose of receiving diagnostic treatment or other medical service. VHA inpatients are classified on the Gains and Loss sheet and through the Patient Treatment File (PTF).
- V. **Long Term Care:** Services required by persons who are chronically ill, aged, or disabled, in an institution or at home on a long-term basis. The term is often used more narrowly to refer only to long-term institutional care such as that provided in nursing homes and mental hospitals.
- W. **Medical Necessity:** Medical necessity is defined as tests and services that are determined to be reasonable and necessary. Documentation supporting diagnosis codes assigned for procedures performed must be maintained in the record and be legible. Physicians must provide the specific symptom, sign or diagnosis at the time the service is ordered. Each facility should have a process in place to identify appropriateness of services to be rendered.
- X. **Medical Record:** A patient file containing sufficient information to clearly identify the patient, to justify the patient's diagnosis and treatment, and to accurately document the results. The record serves as a basis for planning and continuity of patient care and provides a means of communication among physicians and any other professionals involved in the patient's care. The record also serves as a basis for review, study, and evaluations on serving and protecting the legal interests of the patient, hospital, and responsible practitioner. A patient file may be paper, electronic, other storage media, or a combination thereof.
- Y. **Modifiers:** Supplemental codes used with CPT or HCPCS codes to indicate that a service or procedure that has been performed has been altered by some specific circumstances but not changed in its definition or code. Examples of modifiers: 21 = prolonged evaluation and management services; E-1 = upper left eyelid; AT = acute treatment; AH = clinical psychologist; AJ = clinical social worker.
- Z. **Most Extensive Procedures:** When CPT descriptors designate several procedures of increasing complexity, only the code describing the most extensive procedure actually performed should be submitted.
- AA. **Mutually Exclusive Code Pairs:** These CPT codes represent services or procedures that, based on either the CPT definition or standard medical practice, would not or could not reasonably be performed at the same session by the same provider on the same patient. Mutually exclusive procedures are those procedures that cannot be reasonably performed during the same session.
- BB. **Non-Count vs. Count Clinic:** A clinic in VISTA is set up as a non-count clinic or a count clinic. A non-count clinic workload will not be included in any workload purposes. A count clinic will be included in workload statistics.
- CC. **Non-Physician Practitioner:** A health care professional who is not a physician. Examples of Non-Physician Practitioners are nurse practitioners, physician assistants, and certified registered nurse anesthetists.

- DD. **Outpatient:** A patient who is receiving ambulatory care at a hospital or other facility without being admitted to the facility.
- EE. **Outpatient Visit:** The visit of an outpatient to one or more units or facilities located or directed by the provider maintaining the outpatient health care services (clinic, physician office, hospital/medical center) within one calendar day.
- FF. **Patient Class:** A patient class is a methodology under the Resource Planning and Management section to categorize patients into Various work groups for pricing future budgetary target allowances.
- GG. **PCE:** Patient Care Encounter is VISTA software which enables transmission of an ambulatory encounter, inpatient professional fees, or ancillary service data to the National Patient Care Database. A patient must be assigned to a clinic through either scheduling or through the Automated Information Collection System (AICS) manual data entry option. PCE direct data entry, PIMS checkout, AICS, Laboratory and Radiology are the only nationally released applications currently entering data into PCE.
1. Inpatient professional fees can be captured under the Patient Care Encounter software or through Event Capture. Basic PCE information needed before an encounter is created is:
    - Time of admission,
    - Time of discharge,
    - Time of consult,
    - Time of subsequent visits (if adding a separate entry/date),
    - Time of procedure/surgical operation, and
    - Determination as to whether treatment is for a service-connected or environmental contaminant exposure condition.
  2. Information to enter through PCE:
    - ICD-9-CM codes for diagnoses for each encounter created,
    - CPT codes for E&M and/or surgical procedure/operation encounter created,
    - Attending, admitting and discharge encounter created.
  3. Lab and radiology do require diagnostic information. The request for other ancillary tests should include the sign or symptom that occasioned the diagnostic test. The physician who is expected to read the results should be listed as the primary provider. The technician can be entered as a secondary provider. A perception of "unbundling" can occur if you enter into PCE the technician with the technical portion and the reading with the physician.
- HH. **Place of Service:** Information about the location where the service was provided. This will include the 3-digit medical center identifier, with any applicable suffixes, as well as the DSS identifiers.

II. **Patient Treatment File (PTF):**

1. **Principal Diagnosis (DXLS):** Defined as "that condition established after study to be chiefly responsible for occasioning the admission of the patient to the hospital for care". **Note:** VHA Directive 10-94-041 changed our position in coding from the "primary" diagnosis to "principal" diagnosis. For all discharges prior to October 1, 1994, the DXLS was defined as the situation responsible for the major part of the patient's length of stay.
2. **Procedure:** A significant procedure is one that is:
  - Surgical in nature,
  - Carries a procedural risk,
  - Carries an anesthetic risk, or
  - Requires special training.

When more than one procedure is performed, the principal procedure is:

- Procedure performed for definitive treatment, or
- Procedure was necessary to take care of a complication.

If there appears to be two procedures that can be designated as principal, then the one most related to the principal diagnosis should be selected as the principal procedure.

3. Secondary or Additional Diagnoses: All conditions that coexist at the time of admission, that develop subsequently, or that affect the treatment received and/or the length of stay. These secondary diagnoses are interpreted as those that require:

- Clinical evaluation,
- Therapeutic intervention,
- Diagnostic procedures,
- Extended length of stay, or
- Increased nursing care and/or monitoring.

- JJ. **Provider:** A business entity which furnishes health care to a consumer; it includes a professionally licensed practitioner who is authorized to operate a health care delivery facility (ASTM 1384-91). FOR VHA purposes, a VHA medical center, to include its identified divisions and satellite clinics, is considered to be the business entity furnishing health care at the organizational level.
- KK. **Separate Procedures:** These CPT codes may occasionally be provided as part of a more comprehensive procedure and at those times these codes with a designation of a "separate procedure" should be submitted with their related and more comprehensive codes. This indicated that the procedure, while possible to perform separately, is generally included in the more comprehensive procedure code and should not be billed separately.
- LL. **Skilled Nursing Facility:** A facility with an organized professional staff that provides medical, continuous nursing, and Various other health and social services to patients who are not in an acute phase of illness, but who require primarily restorative or skilled nursing care on an inpatient basis.
- MM. **Unbundling:** The practice of a provider billing for multiple components of a service that were previously included in a single fee. For example, if dressings and instruments were included in a fee for a minor procedure, the fee for the procedure remains the same, but there are now additional charges for the dressings and instruments.
- NN. **Upcoding:** The process of selecting a code for a service that is more intense, extensive, or has a higher charge, than the service actually provided.
- OO. **Visit:** An episode of care in one or more clinics within a calendar day.
- PP. **With/Without Services:** Certain CPT descriptors designate that procedures performed "with" or "without" other services. Submit only the code describing the service actually performed.

## VI. INPATIENT CODING GUIDELINES

- A. The Official Guidelines for Coding and Reporting can be found in the *Coding Clinic for ICD-9-CM*, a publication of the American Hospital Association.

B. VHA guidelines for inpatient coding:

1. When a patient is transferred to a private hospital for a procedure and subsequently returns for follow-up care, the principal diagnosis remains the condition for which the patient was transferred. Code V58.49 is to be assigned as an additional code. When a patient is transferred to a private hospital for a procedure and returns within the same calendar day, the procedure is coded as a part of the current hospitalization.
2. When a patient is admitted after having a procedure in the ambulatory setting, the principal diagnosis is the condition that was the reason for admission, (i.e., vomiting, urinary retention) with the condition for which the procedure was performed listed as a secondary code in addition to code, V58.49. If no further detail is available, assign code V58.49, Other specified aftercare following surgery, as the principal diagnosis. Assign the appropriate code for the reason for the surgery for the procedure performed. Reference: Coding Clinic, First Quarter 1996
3. When an inpatient of the domiciliary has an ambulatory procedure, the procedure **is not** coded into the current admission in the Patient Treatment File (PTF).
4. When an inpatient of the facility's nursing home care unit has an ambulatory procedure, the procedure **is** coded into the current NHCU admission in the Patient Treatment File.
5. Currently, a maximum of 10 diagnostic codes may be submitted on the PTF final disposition transaction (TT701). Therefore, professional judgement is required to prioritize and sequence pertinent diagnoses to paint a clear picture of the hospitalization while ascertaining the correct DRG assignment. The following guideline may be of assistance to coders. However, we urge coders to work with their supervisor on local policy decisions.
  - DXLS (Principal) condition established after study to be chiefly responsible for occasioning the admission of the patient to the hospital for care
  - Complications/Comorbid Conditions (CC)
  - Acute conditions should take precedence over chronic conditions
  - Other codes, ie V-codes, E-codes.
6. The PTF allows for thirty-two procedure records (TT601) for a period of hospitalization. Five procedure codes may be reported per day. If more than thirty-two records exist, codes should be consolidated when possible on another date within the same movement (TT501), or deleted, based on clinical importance.
7. The PTF allows for the entry of twenty-five patient movement transactions for a period of hospitalization. Five codes may be reported per movement. If more than twenty-five movements exist, supervisory utilities must be used to flag selected movements for non-transmission.
8. When a patient is admitted for substance abuse or inpatient psychiatry, it is not necessary to code the therapy (i.e., one-to-one, group or recreation). Therapies are considered part of the substance abuse treatment. If your facility has value in capturing this data, it should be included in your own local coding policy.
9. When the record contains documentation of substance or alcohol abuse/dependence that is unrelated to care rendered during the current period of hospitalization, these diagnoses **are not** coded.
10. Use 414.01 for a patient with CAD and no mention of a past history of CABG. It can be assumed that a native coronary vessel is occluded. However, the physician can still be queried if unclear.

11. The fifth digit subclassification for use with category 410 is determined by the episode of care. If a patient has a myocardial infarction during the current period of hospitalization, a fifth digit of "1" is assigned. If a patient has a myocardial infarction at another facility, and is subsequently transferred to this facility, the fifth digit remains "1". If the patient is discharged to home during any portion of the eight -week post infarct period and is readmitted, the fifth digit of "2" is assigned.
12. When coding transfusion of blood, plasma, or platelets (site specific decision), enter the code only once per PTF bed movement for each specific blood transfusion.
13. Do not assign the code for malignancy if the primary site is no longer present. Assigning a code from the "V10" category as an additional diagnosis should identify the previous primary site. An exception to this guideline will occur if the reason for admission/treatment is for a previously excised neoplasm. For example, a patient had a malignant lesion removed but returns in two weeks to have a wide excision done to make sure that all of the neoplasm was excised. This would be considered part of the initial care for the cancer and the appropriate cancer code would be coded. Reference: Coding Clinic, Fifth Issue 1994
14. When coding radiation and/or chemotherapy, the code will be entered for the number of days the patient received treatment. When coding radiation therapy, code 92.24 will be used unless documentation in the record indicates otherwise.
15. All operations (01.0 - 86.99) are to be coded.
16. The following diagnostic and non-diagnostic procedures are to be coded. Each medical center may make their own determination to add to this list .

Radiation	Rehab/detox
Intubation and irrigation	Gastric lavage
Mechanical ventilation	Transfusions
CPAP	Chemotherapy
BiPAP	TPN
ESWL	Feeding tubes -
Intravenous pyelogram	gastric/nasogastric
Intra-operative cholangiogram	ECT
Cardiac catheterization	Arteriography using contrast
MRI	MUGA scans
DPT Thallium	Retrograde Pyelograms
Swan-Ganz	A-Lines

17. E-codes are used, when appropriate, to identify injury, poisoning, or adverse affects. A poisoning code cannot be used with a therapeutic use code.
18. Assign separate codes for multiple injuries unless coding books contain different instructions or if there is insufficient information to separate the codes.
19. Unless documented by the physician, the results of tests for sputum/blood cultures are not to be used for determining a more definitive code. Query the physician for more specifics.
20. Code V57.89 is used as a secondary code for rehabilitation of substance abuse/dependence episodes of care in an approved program. This code is not used when only detoxification occurs.
21. Procedure codes are to be used at their highest level of specificity. VHA does not accept procedure codes with the third and fourth digits of ".00".
22. Surgical procedures, which were started but not completed, are to be coded as far as the procedure went.

- assign a code for exploratory procedure if a cavity or space was entered.
  - assign a code for incision if a site was opened but the cavity or space was not entered.
  - assign a code for conversion from a laparoscopic to open procedure as appropriate.
  - no procedure code is assigned if an incision was not made. Code canceled procedures to the V64" category.
23. When the cause of the acute exacerbation of COPD is not clearly identified, or the physician indicates COPD with acute exacerbation without further indication of the cause, the correct code assignment is 491.21.
24. All secondary diagnoses that require the following are to be coded:
- Clinical evaluation
  - Therapeutic treatment
  - Diagnostic procedures
  - Extended length of hospital stay
  - Increased nursing care and/or monitoring
25. Diagnosis listed on the summary as historical information or status-post procedures performed on a previous stay that have no bearing on the current stay are not to be coded.
26. Conditions that are an integral part of the disease process are not assigned as additional codes.
27. Conditions that are not an integral part of the disease process are coded when present.
28. Abnormal findings are not coded unless the physician indicates their clinical significance.
29. Any post-operative complication is to be coded when the record reflects tests, increased monitoring by nursing, and/or treatment of the complication. Query the physician.
30. Symptom codes are not to be used when a more definitive diagnosis is present in the record as to the cause of the symptom.
31. When diagnostic statements are identified as "possible", "probable", "suspected", or "rule out", it will be coded as a confirmed diagnosis. If the diagnostic statement says "ruled out", it will not be coded.
32. V-codes (V01.0 - V82.9) may be used for circumstances other than a disease, symptom, problem, or injury. Follow-up codes are used to explain continuing surveillance following completed treatment of a disease, condition, or injury. They infer that the condition has been fully treated and no longer exists. They should not be confused with aftercare codes which explain current treatment for a healing condition or its sequelae. V-codes are to be used when a condition co-exists at the time of admission and/or has a bearing on the current stay. This would include, but not be limited to, lack of housing (V60.0), person living alone (V60.3), history of cancer (V10.XX), and status-post artificial opening (V44.X). For additional guidance on the use of V codes, refer to *AHA Coding Clinic*, 4th Quarter, 1996.
33. Diagnoses should be sequenced as follows: Principal diagnosis is the first code; acute conditions and complications take precedence over chronic, co-morbid conditions.
34. When a condition is stated as "acute" and "chronic", code both conditions, sequencing the acute condition first.
35. Code fractures as closed unless specified as open.
36. Code only the most severe degree of burn when different degrees of burn occur at the same site.

37. Principal diagnosis code assignments for domiciliary patients are assigned based on their Treating Specialty and diagnosis. Codes listed below should be sequenced as principal when appropriate to the period of hospitalization:
  - V57.22 Vocational Rehabilitation
  - 309.81 Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
  - 303.9x Alcohol Dependence (w/Rehabilitation also code 94.61 or 94.67)
  - 304.xx Drug Dependence (w/Rehabilitation also code 94.64 or 94.67)
  - 312.31 Gambling Addiction
  - Other principal diagnosis as appropriate.
38. Principal diagnosis code assignment for respite care patients is the condition responsible for the care of the patient. Code "V60.5" or "V60.4" is assigned as an additional code.
39. A late effect is the residual effect (manifestation) after the acute phase of an illness or injury has terminated. There is no time limit on when a late effect code can be used. The residual may be apparent early, such as in cerebrovascular accident cases, or it may occur months or years later, such as that due to a previous injury.
40. Patients who are admitted while on mechanical ventilation should be assigned the appropriate code from 96.7x. The duration should be calculated based on the date the patient was admitted to the receiving facility. Patients who are discharged and remain on mechanical ventilation should have the appropriate code from 96.7x assigned based on duration from the initial date of ventilation until discharge or transfer.
41. Dialysis treatments must be tallied and documented on each patient movement date within a period of hospitalization (as a TT601) to ensure inclusion with specific treating specialties, i.e., Medical Intensive Care Unit.
42. Traumatic brain injury patients who are admitted for rehabilitation should be coded to the "V57.xx" category with a code for current injury or late effect (905.0 or 907.0) listed as an additional code, as appropriate.

## VII. OUTPATIENT CODING GUIDELINES

A. The Official Guidelines for Coding and Reporting can be found in the *CPT Assistant*, a publication of the American Medical Association for reporting outpatient ambulatory procedures and evaluation and management services. Evaluation and Management (E&M) services are used to capture the provider's professional services performed on either an inpatient or outpatient setting. (Refer to Evaluation and Management Table).

B. VHA guidelines for outpatient coding:

1. In selecting the correct level of service for E&M encounters, specific documentation must be present for the three components of the visit: History, Physical Examination, and Medical Decision-making.
2. The Subjective, Objective, Assessment, and Plan (SOAP) format is an acceptable format to document the above three key components for an outpatient visit. All three key components must be documented for an initial outpatient visit and two out of the three for an established outpatient visit. If counseling and coordination of care is over 50% of the visit, then **TIME** becomes the key component in determining the level of service. Documentation of topics discussed, conclusions, instructions, and persons involved must be completed by the provider of service.

**Note:** The amount of time needs to be documented by the physician or provider in order to use a code for prolonged service that is 50% or more. All referrals for ancillary tests and procedures must be documented in the medical record as part of an encounter along with the reason for each referral.

3. Bundling and Unbundling (Fragmenting): Below are the Medicare HCFA bundling guidelines, as well as industry standards, for coding multiple surgery procedures. Procedures considered "incidental" are included in the code for the primary procedure and no additional coding is required.
4. *Coding and billing staff should not unbundle CPT codes. Unbundling* is the billing of multiple procedure codes for a group of procedures that are covered by a single comprehensive code. Unbundling includes fragmenting one service into component parts and reporting separate codes for related services when a comprehensive code includes them all and coding both the surgical approach and the procedure separately.

For example, a patient undergoes a simple removal of a foreign body (20520) and has an injection (20550), the injection is a component code of the simple removal and would not be coded. Unbundling also refers to the use of incompatible codes for ICD-9 and CPT or the use of two contradictory CPT codes. **Obtain a current HCFA "Bundles List" from your local Medicare carrier.**

5. Diagnostic and procedure codes selected on the Encounter Form must match the documentation in the medical record in order to satisfy medicolegal requirements and to determine medical necessity. Diagnoses must be coded to the highest level of specificity. Some diagnoses require coding to the fifth digit for billing and reporting the patient encounter. Procedures will not be 'unbundled'.
6. The appropriate code or codes from 001.0 and V82.9 must be used to identify diagnoses, symptoms, conditions, problems, complaints, or other reason(s) for the encounter/visit.
7. The diagnosis, condition, problem, symptom, injury or other reason for the encounter or visit which is chiefly responsible for services provided should be sequenced first. List additional codes that describe any coexisting conditions (reasons that affect care rendered during the visit).
8. Do not code conditions that were previously treated and no longer exist. Code all documented conditions that coexist at the time of the encounter/visit and require or affect patient care, treatment, or management.
9. V-codes (V01.0 - V82.9) may be used to code encounters for circumstances other than a disease, symptom, problem, or injury. Follow-up codes are for use to explain continuing surveillance following completed treatment of a disease, condition, or injury. They infer that the condition has been fully treated and no longer exists. They should not be confused with aftercare codes which explain current treatment for a healing condition or its sequelae. Follow-up codes may be used in conjunction with history codes to provide the full picture of the healed condition and repeated visits. Should a condition be found to have recurred on the followup visit, then the diagnosis code should be used in place of the follow-up code. For additional guidance on the use of V codes, refer to *AHA Coding Clinic*, 4th Quarter, 1996.
10. Do not code diagnoses documented as "probable," "suspected," "questionable," "rule out," or a "working diagnosis" as you would when coding inpatient diagnoses. Code the condition(s) to the highest degree of certainty for that encounter/visit, using symptoms, signs, or other reason(s) for the visit.
11. When only diagnostic services are provided during an encounter or visit, first sequence the symptom, sign, condition, problem, or other reason for the encounter/visit shown in the medical record to be chiefly responsible for the outpatient services provided during the encounter /visit. Codes for other diagnoses (e.g., chronic conditions) may be sequenced as additional diagnoses (if the current treatment affects the care rendered during the visit); for example, Complete Blood Count, liver profile for a patient on methotrexate for rheumatoid arthritis.

12. When **therapeutic services** are the **ONLY** services provided during an encounter or visit, first sequence the diagnosis, condition, problem, or other reason for the encounter/visit shown in the medical record. The **only exception** is that the appropriate V code is used for patients receiving chemotherapy, radiation therapy, or rehabilitation services.
13. For patients receiving only preoperative evaluations, sequence a code from category V72.8 to describe the pre-op services and code the reason for the surgery as an additional diagnosis. Also, code any findings related to the preoperative evaluation.
14. For routine and administrative examinations (general checkup, etc.), first list the appropriate V code for the examination. If a diagnosis or condition is discovered, it should be coded as an additional code.
15. For ambulatory surgery cases, code the diagnosis for which the surgery was performed. If the postoperative diagnosis is known to be different from the preoperative diagnosis, at the time the diagnosis is confirmed, code the postoperative diagnosis.
16. For cases in which the patient is admitted to inpatient services following outpatient surgery, apply UHDDS guidelines for the principal diagnosis. Also, code the reason for the outpatient surgery and the outpatient surgery procedure.
17. Chronic conditions treated on an ongoing basis may be coded and reported as many times as the patient received treatment and care for the condition.
18. Using codes for referring a patient for a test: A lab draw, EKG, or any other test not performed in the clinic area will not be coded by the clinic. If the patient is referred to the lab or for an EKG or x-ray, this is already included in the E&M code. The clinic or ancillary location that performs the actual test will use the code to describe that test.

## VIII. SPECIFIC CODING PROCEDURES

### A. Ancillary Services

1. A lab draw, EKG or any other test that was not performed in the clinic area will not be coded by the clinic. If the patient is referred to the lab or EKG or X-ray, this is already included in the E&M code. The clinic or ancillary location that performs the actual test will use the code to describe that test.
2. **Medication Refill:** It is not the intent to make VHA a pharmacy. Coding is independent of whether a service is billable or not. Encounters for refill only are non-billable. The following guidelines should be followed when coding if:
  - New patient - VA physicians are obligated to examine the patient and make an independent medical decision on whether to prescribe medications. Thus, a diagnosis code along with new patient (E&M) code is in order rather than a V code.
  - Established patient - has a provider encounter that is solely to order a refill then the appropriate V code may be used.
  - Patient seen for assessment and treatment and the note mentions prescription refill then it is appropriate to code the diagnosis and/or for the condition(s) the patient was seen.

### B. Diagnostic Testing

1. When a diagnostic test confirms a suspected diagnosis, the diagnosis should be coded, not the signs and/or symptoms that prompted the ordering of the test. The signs/symptoms can be reported as secondary diagnoses if their presence is not fully accounted for by the primary diagnosis. If the diagnostic test proves normal or did not provide a diagnosis, the primary diagnosis should be coded according to the signs and/or symptoms.

2. If for some reason, the interpreting physician does not have diagnostic information regarding the rationale behind the ordering of the test and the ordering practitioner is unavailable, it is permissible by CMS standards to ask the patient or consult his/her medical record for clarification.
3. Incidental findings should never be coded as the primary diagnosis, even if they are far more serious than the primary diagnosis. For example, a patient who receives an X-ray for wheezing and is found to have degenerative joint disease of the spine will still have the symptoms of wheezing coded as the primary diagnosis.
4. In the case of unrelated or co-existing diagnoses (e.g., the wheezing was due to pneumonia, but the patient was also found to have hypertension), additional diagnoses may be reported (e.g., pneumonia is primary, hypertension secondary).
5. If a diagnostic test is ordered without sign/symptoms or some other prospective diagnosis, the corresponding screening diagnosis code (i.e. V code) will always be the primary diagnosis, even if the test results are abnormal. Any abnormality must be coded as a secondary diagnosis to the screening diagnosis code. Reference: Coding & Medicare Updates, The Medical Management Institute, October 2001

**C. Emergency Room Visits**

1. Documentation maintained in the medical record must include, as appropriate to the service, an emergency visit that includes:
  - Physician's emergency documentation
  - Nursing notes
  - Test results
  - Demographic information
  - Treatment
2. Diagnosis and CPT surgical procedure codes (if applicable) are assigned by the coder based on the diagnosis and procedure recorded by the treating physician in the emergency room record. The physician's emergency medical record documentation and test results are reviewed to assist in code assignment.
3. The Emergency Department has its own Evaluation and Management (E&M) codes for services provided and no distinction is made between new and established patients. However, ER services must be properly differentiated between "emergent" care and "urgent" care for coding purposes. Appendix D of the CPT manual contains clinical examples to assist you.
  - *Emergent Care* is needed for a medical condition manifesting itself by acute symptoms of sufficient severity such that the absence of immediate medical attention could reasonably result in serious impairment or dysfunction of a bodily organ or function. An E&M code from the range (99281 - 99288) is assigned. Emergent care requires the site-specific services and qualified staff to be available 24/7.
  - *Urgent Care* means services are furnished to an individual who requires services to be provided within 12 hours in order to avoid the likely onset of an emergency medical condition. An E&M code from the range (99201 - 99215) is assigned. Urgent care services are site-specific but are not a true Emergent Care Center. The urgent care facility is not available 24/7.
4. Triage services performed are not coded separately when assigning a code for these encounters.
5. Attention should be given to code (99285) which allows assignment of this code even if all the key components have not been satisfied due to the urgency of the patient's clinical condition and mental status.

6. If a patient receives critical care services in the emergency department; appropriate codes from that subsection should be reported provided the requirements for critical care are met. Time is a key factor in selecting critical care codes.
7. Other Emergency Services (CPT 99288) includes physician directed emergency care or advanced life support where the physician is located in a hospital emergency or critical care department and is in two-way voice contact with ambulance or rescue personnel outside the hospital. The physician directs the performance of necessary procedures.

**D. Face to Face Encounters**

1. For coding purposes, *face-to-face time* is defined as only that time that the provider spends face-to-face with the patient and/or family. This includes the time spent obtaining a history, performing an examination, and counseling the patient.
2. Providers also spend time doing work before and after the face-to-face encounter performing such tasks as reviewing records and tests, arranging for further services, and communicating with others through written reports and the telephone. This non-face-to-face time, also called pre- and post-encounter time, is not included in extending the time component of the service. However, the pre- and post-encounter work is included as part of calculating the level of service and selecting the appropriate E&M code.
3. Since pre- and post-encounter time and work is included in the E&M code for the visit, then a separate code for such effort is not allowed.

Please note that tasks related to administrative functions, or related to the day-to-day operation of a facility, are not essentially clinical in nature and *do not meet* the definition of evaluation and management codes and guidelines. These tasks are not considered encounters and are not part of the coding of ambulatory care services.

**E. Interventional Radiology: Non-Coronary Procedures**

Interventional Radiology procedure codes include both diagnostic and therapeutic services. In most instances 2 codes are required for any one procedure. Most of the codes are distinct and don't inherently include other services that are easily performed at the same encounter or session. These procedures have no global period. Separate Evaluation and Management services performed the same day may be coded with the 25 modifier.

**1. Arteriograms**

- a) Coding for these procedures requires determining the access site, the injection site and if these two differ, then the route used to get to the injection site. All vascular catheterizations are described as either selective or nonselective. In order to code vascular procedures correctly, you must know the puncture site, the final position of the catheter and whether normal anatomic conditions exists.
- b) A vascular family is defined as a group of vessels that is fed by a primary vessel; the aorta, vena cava or vessel that was punctured. Vascular family includes:
  - Nonselective
  - First order – is the primary branch off of the nonselective vessel
  - Second order – any secondary branch and comes off of the first order vessel
  - Third order and higher – any the tertiary branch and comes off of the second order vessel
  - Third order only applies to arterial procedures as no corresponding venous code exists.

Example: The common carotid is first order because it connects to the aorta, the external carotid connects to the common carotid so it is 2<sup>nd</sup> order. Off the external carotid is the posterior auricular artery so it is 3<sup>rd</sup> order.

- c) A non-selective catheterization means that an injection was performed inside the aorta, vena cava, or directly into the site punctured. Non-selective catheterization codes may be designated as bilateral with the 50 modifier when access is required from both sides. Vessels on the opposite sides (right and left) are separate vascular families. Nonselective codes include:

Arterial System:

- 36160 aorta, translumbar
- 36200 aorta (femoral, axillary, or brachial or direct puncture)
- 36100 carotid or vertebral
- 36120 axillary or brachial (may be used as selective in certain circumstances)
- 36140 extremity artery other than brachial or axillary (may be used as selective in certain circumstances)
- 36145 arterial-venous dialysis shunt (regardless of which limb of graft or shunt is punctured)

Venous System:

- 36005 injection for contrast venography (use for injections in to previously paced vascular access cath)
- 36010 superior or inferior vena cava
- 36400-36425 venipuncture
- 36481 portal vein

- d) A selective catheterization means that the catheter must be manipulated guided or moved from the aorta, vein or the vessel punctured into another part of the system. As a general rule, selective catheterization takes precedence over non-selective. See #8 and #9 below for the exception.

Arterial System:

- 36215-36218 thoracic, brachiocephalic arteries
- 36245-36248 abdominal, pelvic or lower extremity arteries

Venous System:

- 36011-36012 venous system
- 36013 right heart or main pulmonary artery
- 36014 right or left pulmonary artery
- 36015 segmental or subsegmental pulmonary artery

- e) Within a vascular family the highest order catheterization is the primary code assigned. All the work necessary to reach this level is included in the code for that level. Note: Add-on codes exist for additional second/third order arteries after the first. There are no additional selective venous catheterization codes. Each additional second or third order vein catheterized is included in the code for the first vein and therefore not reported separately.
- f) A separate selective catheterization code should be recorded for each injection site when the catheter has been moved from the aorta or the site accessed. If two punctures were performed to gain vascular access, both would be coded. It is possible to have 2 first order catheterization codes if , for example, the renal artery and the common iliac were studied. Add-on codes 36218 and 36248 are used for additional procedures in the same family and should be added to 36216-17 and 36246-47 respectively.
- g) Supervision and Interpretation codes (75600-75774) will either contain a designation of selective or non-selective. These codes should be paired in definition with correct catheterization codes. A non-selective catheterization code may not go with a selective S&I code. 75774 is a selective add on code to be used after the first procedure in that vascular family.

- h) It sometimes may be necessary to perform aortography and also a separate study of the extremity where the access occurs. Code the catheterization of the aorta and also code the access site with the 59 modifier. Ipsilateral/contralateral studies are also coded by "unbundling" the access site with the 59 modifier.
- i) Portal Vein system catheterization is a special case. If a specific vein is selected in addition to the portal vein it may be coded separately. The work for 36481 is much higher than for others and it would be listed as the primary procedure.

## 2. **Transcatheter Procedures**

- a) These procedures are therapeutic in nature and include only the work described in the code. Angiography for guidance and documentation is included in the angioplasty. The placement of the catheter is reported in addition to the angioplasty. Modifier 59 is not necessary.
- b) These procedures also have a paired Radiology Supervision and Interpretation code. The S&I code should agree with the procedure code.
- c) There are codes for percutaneous and open. An alternative definition of open is "by cutdown".
- d) If angioplasty is performed through an existing access, additional access should not be coded. For example: angiography is performed and then angioplasty performed immediately after.
- e) Any diagnostic angiography should be coded even if performed on the same date. Post procedure angiography is included in angioplasty, but not for embolization procedures.
- f) Transluminal angioplasty should be coded for each *vessel* separately treated. All lesions in the same vessel are included in the one code.
- g) If angioplasty and atherectomy are performed on the same vessel, both procedures should be coded. Note: Inflation of a positioning balloon catheter is not considered angioplasty.
- h) Transcatheter infusion should be coded for each operative field. Example: If bilateral lower extremities are treated, the procedure is reported twice. Multiple vessels in the same leg would only have one code.
- i) Angioscopy when performed in conjunction with these procedures may be coded using the add-on code 35400.

## 3. **Stents**

- a) Stent services do not include vascular access, diagnostic angiography, thrombolysis, or angioplasty.
- b) These services are designated as percutaneous or open.
- c) Angioplasty performed as a method of stent deployment is not coded separately.
- d) As with angioplasty, post procedure angiography is included.
- e) Add-on codes exist for additional placements after the first. (37206 and 37208).

## F. **Laboratory**

1. Laboratory Panels: HCFA has established HCPCS codes for the newly established laboratory panels. Do not submit codes for individual laboratory tests when a code for a grouping or "panel" exists for the services performed. For example: Lab performs only five out of six tests within a CPT panel. Each of the five tests would require a separate CPT code. If all six of the tests were performed, only the one CPT panel code would be coded.
2. Specimen Handling: When a urine specimen or pap smear is sent to a reference lab, code 99000 should be used to bill for specimen handling. Only one specimen collection charge can be billed per encounter. Collection of specimens by catheterization should be coded using Q0162.
3. Venipuncture: When blood is drawn to be sent to a reference lab, use code 36415 for the venipuncture (Use G0001 for Medicare). Collection by capillary stick does not qualify.
4. Abnormal Pap Smear: The professional component for interpretation of an abnormal pap smear (code 88141, P3001-26) furnished to a hospital inpatient may be separately eligible for reimbursement.
5. Hematology: Physician hematology services include microscopic evaluation of bone marrow aspiration and biopsies. It also include those limited number of peripheral blood smears which need to be referred to a physician to evaluate the nature of an apparent abnormality identified by the technologist (85060, 38220, 85097, and 38221). Payment may be made for the professional component for the interpretation of an abnormal blood smear (code 86060) furnished to a hospital inpatient. Reference: CPT Changes for 2002
6. Blood Banking: Blood banking services of hematologists and pathologists are paid when analyses are performed on donor and/or patient blood to determine compatible donor units for transfusion where cross matching is difficult or where contamination with transmissible disease of donor is suspected (86077, 86078, and 86079). Do not report the 26 modifier.

**G. Non-Physician Extenders: "Incident to"**

VHA's position is not to follow CMS "incident to" guidelines since we will be billing the non-physician extender at a reduced rate under their own identifier, this CMS provision does not apply. These practitioners are VHA employees not physician employees.

**H. Nurse Visits**

Patients come for services performed by a nurse, without further care by a physician or other independent provider, use CPT code 99211 (Minimal Visit) for these visits. Generally, nursing staff is limited to use of the lower E&M level CPT codes, however, nurses are not just limited to 99211. A nurse can utilize an appropriate procedure code for services performed, when ordered by a physician and not in conjunction with a physician visit, when defined within their scope of practice.

**I. Observation Patients**

1. In assigning the principal diagnosis for patients admitted following observation status in the same hospital, use the Uniform Hospital Discharge Data Set (UHDDS) guidelines. UHDDS defines the principal diagnosis as *that condition established after study to be chiefly responsible for occasioning the admission of the patient to the hospital for care.*
2. The observation V codes should be used in very limited circumstances when a person is being observed for a suspected condition that is ruled out. Observation codes are not to be used if an injury or illness or any sign or symptom related to the suspected condition are present. In such cases, the diagnosis/ symptom code is used with the corresponding E code to identify any external cause.
3. Codes from the V71.0 - V71.9 series should be assigned for Observation and Evaluation for suspected conditions.

4. Codes from the V71.0 - V71.9 series are assigned as a PDX for encounters or admissions to evaluate the patient's condition when there is some evidence to suggest the existence of an abnormal condition; following an accident or other incident that ordinarily results in a health problem; and where no supporting evidence of the suspected condition is found and no treatment is currently required.
5. Medical Necessity: The physician is responsible for documenting information to justify ordering diagnostic studies and tests determined to be reasonable and necessary in the outpatient medical record.
  - Example 1: A patient was admitted after a motor vehicle accident for observation and evaluation for a possible intracranial injury. The injury was ruled out. Additional injuries include minor skin abrasions. Assign codes V71.4, observation following other accident, as the PDX. Additional codes may be assigned for minor injuries. **When the purpose of observation is for possible serious injury, the V71 code takes precedence over related minor injuries not requiring hospital admission.**
  - Example 2: Assign code V58.49, Other specified aftercare following surgery, as the PDX when a patient is admitted following outpatient surgery, the physician indicates *continued observation* is necessary and there are no complications. Also, assign a secondary code for the reason for the surgery and for the procedure performed (i.e., inguinal hernia).
  - Example 3: If the physician states that the patient was admitted due to nausea, fever, elevated blood pressure, or other signs/symptoms, assign a code for the condition necessitating the inpatient admission as the PDX.
6. Documentation must include:
  - Admission Order
  - Initial Assessment and H&P
  - Progress Notes
  - Discharge Order
  - Discharge Diagnoses
  - Discharge Note (handwritten or dictated)
7. Patients admitted to observation unit and discharged on the same date: Use the E&M observation codes or inpatient care services (including admission and discharge services, CPT codes 99234 - 99236). To assign them, the patient must remain in observation status for a minimum of eight hours and the physician must see the patient at least twice during the stay. If a patient remains in observation for fewer than eight hours, but is nonetheless admitted and discharged on the same calendar date, the coding changes. In this instance, the physician would assign only an observation code (99218-99220). Reference: ED Coding Alert, The Coding Institute, Sample Issue, received December 2001.
8. Patients admitted to observation and discharged on the next date: Use the initial day observation codes (99218 - 99220) for the first day, then the discharge from observation code, 99217, for the second day.
9. CPT code (99217) can be used for the discharge day management to report all services provided to the patient on discharge from observation status, provided the discharge is on other than the initial date of observation status.
10. Patient admitted to the observation unit, then admitted to the hospital on the same day:
  - Same physician – bill only the initial hospital care code (99221 – 99223).
  - Different physicians – Physician who admitted to observation would bill the appropriate observation code and the physician who admitted the patient to the hospital would bill the initial hospital care code.

11. Patient must be in an observation status for at least eight (8) consecutive hours in order to bill.
12. Per VHA Directive 98-025, routine post procedure recovery from ambulatory surgery is NOT observation.

**J. Pathology Services**

1. Each medical center will need to establish internal procedures for capturing the professional fee component for pathology. Tissue extraction during surgery is part of the surgery.
2. Clinical pathology consultations generally consist of two types:
  - a) A surgeon asks a pathologist whether, based on test results, patient history and medical records, the patient should be considered a candidate for surgery. The surgeon is requesting a medical judgment. Consultations of this nature are considered complex and should be reported under code 80502.
  - b) An interpretive consultation (80500) is a consultation of limited duration requiring medical judgment in interpreting test findings and furnishing information directly related to the condition of the patient to the attending physician, which ordinarily cannot be furnished by a non-physician laboratory specialist.

**K. Radiology Services**

1. Radiology procedures that require more than one CPT code will be captured within the Radiology file. Each site must review interventional radiology coding to see if procedures described by multiple codes are in the Radiology package and used appropriately.
2. Modifiers –26, –52, –59, –76, and –77 and the Level II (HCPCS) modifiers apply to radiology procedures.
3. When a radiology procedure is reduced, the correct reporting is to code the extent of the procedure performed. If no code exists for what has been done, report the intended code with modifier –52 appended.

**L. Teaching Physician and Resident Requirements:**

***NOTE: It should be understood that documentation of patient care that is acceptable for purposes of third-party billing is governed by guidelines that are defined by payers, such as the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) or third-party insurers. Below are CMS guidelines.***

1. Under the primary care exemption, teaching physicians can bill codes 99201-99203 for new patients and 99211-99213 for established patients when E/M services are provided by residents without a teaching physician present, however the teaching physician must be immediately available.

Also the following conditions must be met:

- Services are furnished in the outpatient department of a hospital or another ambulatory care entity.
- The resident furnishing such services must have completed more than six (6) months of an approved residency program. (42 CFR 413.86 (f)(I)(iii))
- The teaching physician shall not supervise more than four (4) residents at any given time and must be within such proximity to be immediately available to the residents.
- The patient must be an identifiable group who consider the center to be the continuing source of their care and residents must generally follow the same group of patients throughout their residency program.

- The teaching physician must:
  - Not have other responsibilities (including the supervision of other personnel) at the time of the service for which payment is sought;
  - Assume management responsibility for those patients seen by the residents;
  - Ensure that the services furnished are appropriate;
  - Review with each resident during or immediately after each encounter the patient's medical history, physical examination, diagnosis, and record of tests and therapies; and
  - **Document** the extent of his or her own participation in the review and direction of the services furnished to each patient.
2. Time based Codes: For procedures determined on the basis of time, the teaching physician must be present for the period of time for which the claim is made. For example, individual medical psychotherapy (CPT 90842-4), critical care services (CPT 99291-2) and E/M codes for counseling or coordination of care that equals more than 50% of the encounter.
  3. Concurrent surgeries: The teaching surgeon must be present during all critical and key portions of two “overlapping” procedures. The teaching surgeon does not need to be present during the opening or closing of a procedure when these are not defined as key portions but immediately available, if necessary. In the case of three concurrent surgeries, the teaching surgeon's role becomes a supervisory service to the hospital, rather than a physician service to an individual patient and is NOT payable under the physician fee schedule. It will be paid under Part A. Note: This is not the case with teaching anesthesiologists.
  4. Surgery documentation and physical presence: When a teaching physician is present for the entire surgical procedure (from opening to closing), his physician presence can be demonstrated by notes in the medical record made by the physician himself/herself, the resident or the operating room nurse. For surgeons present for key portions only, they must document aspects of the key portion. The VHA surgical package annotates the attending's presence on the operative report under the field “Attend Code”:
    - 0 Staff Alone
    - 1 Attending in O.R.
    - 2 Attending in O.R. Suite
    - 3 Attending not Present, but Available
  5. Endoscopic Procedures: In order to bill for procedures performed through an endoscope (other than endoscopic operations that follow the surgery policy) the teaching physician must be present during the entire viewing. The entire viewing includes insertion and removal of the device. Viewing of the entire procedure through a monitor in another room does not meet the physician presence requirement.

**M. Telemedicine:**

1. Telemedicine is generally described as the use of communication equipment to link health care practitioners and patients in different locations. HCFA has not formally defined telemedicine for the Medicaid program, and Federal Medicaid law does not recognize telemedicine as a distinct service. Nevertheless, Medicaid reimbursement for services furnished through telemedicine applications are available, at the State's option, as a cost-effective alternative to the more traditional ways of providing medical care.
2. Most states that provide payment for services furnished using telemedicine technology do so in the form of a physician consultation. Non-physician practitioners may also be covered depending on their scope of practice under state law. Teleradiology is assumed to be covered by all 50 States because of its prevalent use in many Radiology practices.

3. States covering medical services that utilize telemedicine may reimburse for both the provider at the hub site for the consultation, and the provider at the spoke site for an office visit. States also have the flexibility to reimburse any additional cost (i.e., technical support, line-charges, depreciation on equipment, et.) associated with the delivery of a covered service by electronic means as long as the payment is consistent with the requirements of efficiency, economy, and quality of care.
4. HCFA is now covering some telemedicine services and modifiers can be used for this service. If the note clearly states the service is via “telemedicine” then use the appropriate CPT code and append the “telemedicine modifier –GT”.

## **IX. EVALUATION AND MANAGEMENT CODING:** (1997 guidelines)

*Please note that E&M guidelines are under revision. You may use either 1995 or 1997. The new guidelines mostly resemble the 1995 guidelines .*

### **A. New Patient**

New Patient codes can only be used if any physician within the same specialty in the clinic has not seen the patient within three (3) years or not seen at the facility with a three (3) year period. If a physician has not seen the patient in a particular specialty within a three-year period, this would constitute a new patient visit. If an initial visit and procedure (i.e., minor surgery) are performed on the same day of service then both may be coded separately. (See modifier 25)

- A veteran who lives in Ohio, treated at the VHAMC in Cincinnati, is now seen for the first time as a winter visitor at the VHAMC in Miami, Florida. The veteran would be a new patient to Miami. If he returns next year to Miami, he is then classified as an established patient if seen by the same treating specialty.
- A veteran is seen by his primary physician who refers the patient to an urologist. This is the first time the veteran has been seen by an urologist (or by an urologist within the last three years). This veteran is considered a new patient for the urology visit.
- A veteran who is seen for the first time by a primary care physician, returns the following year to be seen by another primary care physician, this veteran visit is not considered a new patient but as an established patient.
- A veteran is seen for the first time by a primary care physician at the VAMC as a new patient. The patient is seen by another primary care physician at the Medical Center's CBOC the following week, this veteran visit is not considered a new patient but as an established patient.

### **B. Established Patient**

An Established Patient is one who has received any professional services from the physician or another physician of the same specialty who belongs to the same group practice, within the past three (3) years.

Some suggested guidelines for coding office visits for established patients.

- **99211 - Minimal**

Examples:

- Visit for supervised drug screening
- Visit for cursory check of hematoma one day after venipuncture
- Visit for blood pressure check
- Visit to redress an abrasion
- Visit for instructions on the use of peak flow meter
- Visit to review test result

- **99212 - Problem-focused** - Most often seen for only one problem or related problems. Most common code for primary care.

Examples:

- Visit for complaint of sore throat and headache

- Visit for an upper respiratory infection
- Visit for a recheck of a chronic condition, such as diabetes
- **99213 - Expanded Problem-focused** - Most often seen for more than one chronic problem or low level of complexity. Used by primary care and specialists.  
Examples:
  - Visit for management of hypertension with mild fatigue on a beta blocker regimen
  - Visit for monitoring insulin-dependent diabetes with stable coronary artery disease
  - Visit for stable cirrhosis of the liver
- **99214 - Detailed** - Most often seen for more than one chronic condition and one or more acute conditions.  
Examples:
  - Evaluation of regional enteritis, diarrhea and low grade fever
  - Visit for routine review of non-insulin dependent diabetes, obesity, hypertension and congestive heart failure
- **99215 - Comprehensive** - Most often seen for moderate to highly severe presenting problem(s).  
Examples:
  - Visit for one-year post-therapy for lymphoma with new lymphadenopathy
  - Visit for recent history of fatigue, weight loss, intermittent fever, and presenting diffuse adenopathy and splenomegaly
  - Visit for evaluation of recent onset of syncopal attacks in a 70-year-old patient

**C. Consultation vs. Referral Services**

1. A consultation is a service provided by a physician for the further evaluation and/or management of the patient (i.e. opinion/advice). The physician's opinion must be expressed in a report that follows medical record documentation requirements (i.e. who requested the consultation, what tests were ordered, the diagnosis, and treatment recommended). If the consulting physician initiates a diagnostic or therapeutic service at the request of the attending physician (the person in charge of the patient), the service qualifies as a consultation.
2. Referral for procedures, patient "walk-ins", and self-referrals are not considered a consultation. A physician cannot perform a consultation on his/her own patient, however, they can for preoperative clearance. Example: A patient scheduled for a prostatectomy has previously had a myocardial infarction. The surgeon requests a consultation for preoperative clearance from the cardiologist.
3. Once the consulting physician assumes responsibility for the patient's continuing care, any subsequent services rendered by that physician are no longer a consultation. Further visits are billed as "established office visits". The key here is whether (a) the attending physician retains control over management of the patient's care or (b) the patient's care is assumed by the consulting physician.
4. If the "requesting" physician requests another consultation for the same/different problem, the consultant may bill another consultation. There is only one initial consult per admission/per consultant. There are no follow-up consultation codes in an outpatient setting, only inpatient.
5. The term *referral* has two meanings. It can be used to describe a situation in which one physician sends a patient to another for the second physician's opinion OR it can represent a situation in which the attending physician feels that he or she is unable to treat the patient's condition and sends the patient to another physician for treatment.

6. Consultations are no longer a physician only service when performance is within a non-physician's scope of practice under State law. When the three key components (history, examination, and medical decision making) are not documented during a consultation, code 99499. Reference: Medicare Carriers Manual, Section 15506, dated September 27, 2001 but effective July 1, 2001

**D. Office Visit and Ambulatory Procedure**

The charge for an office visit (E&M code) is included in the charge for a minor office surgery. An office visit can be billed separately when the visit is for a separate and significant E&M service above and beyond the procedure performed. Different diagnoses are not required. In these cases, modifier-25 must be added to the appropriate E&M code.

**E. Pre and Post-Operative Consultations and Follow-Up Care**

A primary care physician or specialist who performs a pre-operative consultation for a new or established patient at the request of the surgeon may code the encounter as a consultation as long as it meets the "Consultation" criteria. The surgeon's request must be documented in the medical record as well as the consultant's opinion. The consultation request must not be for "convenience" or "routine". Any follow-up care should be coded using the appropriate follow-up EM visit code (not a subsequent consultation code).

**F. Care Plan Oversight**

1. Care plan oversight includes the following physician activities: development or revision of care plans, review of subsequent reports of patient status, review of related laboratory and other studies, communication with other health care professionals involved in the patient's care, integration of new information into the medical treatment plan, and/or adjustment of medical therapy. Care plan oversight does not include the routine pre- and post-service work associated with visits and procedures. Also, telephone calls with patients and/or families are not included. These codes usually fall after placement of a patient. The team conference code is normally used when initially coordinating activities for a patient. These codes are only used when the patient has required complex or multidisciplinary care modalities and the physician is reviewing all their data and directing future care.
2. A physician can bill for their time managing the care of patients under the care of a home health agency, in a nursing home or in a hospice when the physician documents 30 minutes of services performed for that month. This service does not have to be continuous, as documentation and TIME are the key components. Only one physician may report his time with respect to a patient in a given month.
3. Medicare will not pay for care plan oversight of a patient in a nursing home.
4. Consults with internal staff and telephone calls by the physician to the patient or the patient's family cannot be billed separately, but are inclusive in the physician oversight code.
5. The physician must have had a face-to-face encounter with the patient within the last six months before the first month for which the care plan oversight services are billed.

**G. Concurrent Care**

The care of two or more physicians or providers for the same patient during the same episode of care is called *Concurrent Care* (acting in conjunction with each other for the betterment of the patient's condition). These services are evaluated for medical necessity. In general, two physicians cannot treat the same patient for the same condition. The physician is still caring for (treating) the patient, rather than simply rendering an opinion (which would be a consultation), so these visits are considered regular visits on a concurrent care basis. Separate, unrelated diagnoses must be present for which there is active treatment during the same episode of care. Monitoring low level chronic conditions during an acute inpatient stay is usually not considered medically necessary.

## H. Team Conferences/Case Management

Team conferences are performed by providers consulting with other providers or representatives of community agencies to coordinate activities of patient care. Providers must still document in the medical record with notes indicating meetings, topics discussed, attendees, changes to patient management, medication, new orders, etc. The time spent performing these services is considered workload and productivity for providers and personnel through Decision Support System (DSS). Team conferences where the patient is present (usually for the purposes of deciding a treatment plan in a complex case) may be recorded as an encounter and coded using G0175. This code requires that at least 3 disciplines exclusive of nursing be present. Reference: Charges are now associated with the CPT code 99341

## I. Preventive Medicine Services

1. These codes should **not** be reported for patients being seen for a previously diagnosed condition.
2. When a patient visits the office for an annual examination without complaints, codes from the Preventive Medicine section should be used. Usually, preventive medicine services are asymptomatic examinations for which there is no diagnosis, symptom, or complaint. Preventative medicine services are limited to visits where nothing is "wrong" with the patient. The visit remains "routine" and no medical problems are found.
3. If an abnormality is encountered or a preexisting problem is addressed in the process of performing a preventive medicine evaluation and management service, and if the problem/abnormality is significant enough to require additional work to perform the key components of a problem-oriented E&M service, then the appropriate office/outpatient code should also be reported, with the modifier –25 appended to indicate that a significantly, separately identifiable evaluation and management service was provided by the same physician on the same day as the preventive medicine service. The appropriate preventive medicine service code is additionally reported.
4. The extent and focus of these services depend on the age of the patient. These codes include counseling, anticipatory guidance, and risk factor reduction interventions, which are provided at the time of the examination. Immunizations and ancillary studies, including radiology, laboratory, or other procedures are reported separately.
5. If an abnormality is encountered, or a pre-existing problem is addressed, during the same encounter and if the problem is significant enough to require additional work to perform the key components of a problem oriented E&M service, then the appropriate office visit code, 99201-99215, should also be reported. Modifier-25 should be added to the office visit code.

**Please note:** An insignificant or trivial problem encountered, which does not require additional work, should not be reported separately.

6. The preventive medicine service should match the "V" diagnostic code. The E&M service should match the diagnostic code that indicates the disease, condition, or symptom.
7. The "comprehensive" examination for Preventive Medicine is not synonymous with the "comprehensive" examination under E&M office visits. The comprehensive history obtained as part of the preventive medicine E/M service is not problem-oriented, and does not involve a chief complaint or present illness. It does, however, include a comprehensive system review and comprehensive or interval past, family, and social history, as well as a comprehensive assessment/history of pertinent risk factors. The comprehensive examination performed as part of the preventive medicine E&M service is multi-system, but to what extent is based on the age of the patient and identified risk factors. Reference: CPT Assistant, August 1997

**J. Prolonged Physician Services**

1. Payment will be allowed for procedure codes 99354 (prolonged physician service in the office or other outpatient setting; first hour), 99355 (prolonged physician service in the office or other outpatient setting; each additional 30 minutes), 99356 (prolonged physician service in the inpatient setting, first hour), and 99357 (prolonged physician service in the inpatient setting; each additional 30 minutes) when the following criteria are met:

- a) The physician has furnished and billed one of the procedure codes listed in Column 1 as well as the corresponding code(s) in Column 2 for the patient on the same day.

	Column 1	Column 2
i.	<u>Office or other Outpatient Setting:</u>	
	99354	99201 - 99205 99212 - 99215 99241 - 99245
	99355	99354 plus one of the codes required for 99354 (3 codes)
ii.	<u>Inpatient Setting:</u>	
	99356	99221 - 99223 99231 - 99233 99251 - 99255 99261 - 99263 99301 - 99303 99311 - 99313
	99357	99356 plus one of the codes required for 99356 (3 codes)

2. The time counted toward payment for prolonged evaluation and management services included only direct face-to-face contact between the physician and the patient whether or not the service was continuous.
3. The medical record documents the content of the highest level of evaluation and management service code, the duration and content of prolonged services that the physician personally furnished after the typical time of the evaluation and management service has been exceeded by at least 30 minutes.

**K. Telephone Contacts**

Telephone calls to the patient or other Healthcare professional to coordinate the medical management of a patient are considered encounters and may be reported separately using the appropriate level of service in CPT code 99371, 99372, or 99373. However, telephone calls made by the provider on the same day of the visit, either during, before, or after, is included as part of the visit and is reflected in the evaluation and management code. The call should be documented to include the topics discussed and person contacted, etc., to support utilization of the code. A telephone call contributes to the comprehensiveness of the visit and level of service. **Note: Telephone calls are non-billable from a MCCR perspective.**

**L. Patient Transport**

1. Patient transport codes can only be used to report the physical attendance and direct face-to-face care by a physician during the interfacility transport of a critically ill or injured patient (99289 and 99290). Face to face care begins when the physician assumes primary responsibility of the patient at the referring hospital/facility, and ends when the receiving hospital/facility accepts responsibility for the patient's care. Only the time the physician spends in direct face-to-face contact with the patient during the transport should be recorded. Patient transport services involving less than 30 minutes should not be reported.
2. Procedures or services performed by other members of the transport team may not be reported by the supervising physician. Routine monitoring evaluations and initiation of mechanical ventilation performed by the physician are to be included in the face-to-face time and not reported separately. Whereas, time spent by the physician performing separately reportable services or procedures should not be included in the face-to-face time. The direction of emergency care to transporting staff by a physician located in a hospital or other facility by two-way communication is not considered direct face-to-face care and should be reporting using code 99288. Reference: CPT Changes 2002 – New E/M codes

## **X. PROFESSIONAL COMPONENT CODING GUIDELINES FOR INPATIENT STAYS**

### **A. Admission**

1. **Initial Hospital Care:** The admission history and physical will be abstracted and coded with the appropriate Evaluation and Management code (99221 - 99223), admission diagnosis, and attending provider based on the level of inpatient care. The professional fee is not coded for a clinic physician or ER physician if they are also the attending physician of record. The 10-10m produced by the clinic physician or ER physician will be captured in PCE as an outpatient E&M level of service.
2. The Initial Hospital Care includes all related E&M services provided by the attending physician within a 24-hour period. It is intended to be reported for the first hospital encounter with the patient by the attending physician. This date may not be the same as the admission date to the hospital. If the attending writes a note which links to documentation provided by a resident or other providers the day prior, it will only add to the completeness of the Initial Hospital Care admission code. The coder is to use all available documentation referenced by the provider. If the attending physician does not see the patient within 24 hours of admission, the encounter would be coded as a subsequent hospital care visit.
3. **Subsequent Hospital Care:** Per day, includes the review of diagnostic studies and changes in the patient's status since the last assessment for codes 99231-99233 based on the level of care.
4. **Observation or Same Day Admission & Discharge Services:** The code range 99234-99236 reflect E&M codes that support the care provided to an observation patient or inpatient hospital care services provided to patients admitted and discharged on the same date of service based on the level of the service. This includes any "observation status" initiated at during and encounter in another site of service, e.g., emergency room care, physician visit, or nursing facility.

### **B. Anesthesia**

1. The administration of anesthesia should be reported using five-digit CPT procedure codes (00100 - 01999). When conscious sedation is administered assign code 99141-99142. If the surgeon administers the anesthesia, an anesthesia code is not assigned. This is inclusive in the surgery code. If the anesthesiologist started the IV and monitored the MAC (during a regional or general anesthesia) but the surgeon did the actual administration of the drug, modifier -47 would be added to the procedure code.
2. Facilities must ensure start and stop times for anesthesia are entered into the Surgery package.

3. The surgical and anesthesia CPT-4 codes must be entered into PCE or Event Capture System for all inpatient procedures. It is suggested that an "inpatient clinic" be set-up for all inpatient procedures using PCE. Inpatient CPT-4 codes entered into the Surgical Package will not pass to PCE. The decision to use PCE or Event Capture is a local decision.
4. A separate allowance should not be made for a consultation (pre-op work-up) performed by an anesthesiologist prior to definitive surgery (within 24 hours of surgery). This service should be considered part of the care covered by the anesthesia allowance. Post-op anesthesia visit may be coded. Payment may be made for a consultation in either of the following circumstances:
  - a) The consultation results in a decision not to administer anesthesia during that hospital stay and documentation of the circumstances is provided.
  - b) The consultation is not preparatory to surgery, e.g., for a respiratory problem.
5. You do not need to worry about base units or time for anesthesia services. This is a flat fee under Reasonable Charges at the present time.
6. Monitored Anesthesia Care: Monitored anesthesia care (MAC) involves the intraoperative monitoring of the patient's vital physiological signs in anticipation of the need for administration of general anesthesia or of the development of adverse physiological patient reaction to the surgical procedure. MAC also included the performance of a preanesthetic examination and evaluation, prescription of the anesthesia care required, administration of any necessary oral or parenteral medications (e.g., atropine, demerol, valium) and provision of indicated postoperative anesthesia care. The QS modifier should be added to the procedure code in addition to other applicable modifiers to identify the services as monitored anesthesia care. Medical records must document the need for MAC especially for those surgical procedures that can be safely and effectively performed under conscious sedation administered by the physician performing the procedure, e.g., colonoscopy.

**C. Attending Visits**

1. All documented attending visits during the acute care stay will be coded.
2. During the concurrent stay, workload for different diagnoses must be captured for each individual provider seeing the patient on the same day, i.e. when the primary attending physician documents a visit and the consultant documents a visit on the same day the diagnosis for each must be completely different in order to capture the professional component.
3. If two staff physicians see the same patient on the same day, the attending physician should receive the credit. The other staff physician should be coded only if he falls within the consultation guidelines.
4. A physician's order is not a basis for assigning an E&M code for the inpatient professional component and very rarely is time the determining factor in an E&M code selection. Read the CPT codebook for guidelines for when time is appropriate, i.e. critical care services.
5. The determination of the E&M code selection should be based on the attending physician's documentation only unless reference is made to another progress note performed by house staff.
6. Daily progress notes completed by house staff may be billed if appropriate. Specific carriers may pay for resident services. Medigap policies follow Medicare rules. Medicare will not pay for house staff services. Check your local carriers before coding.

**D. Consultations**

1. Consultations completed by residents and fellows may be billed if appropriate. Specific carriers may pay for resident services. Check your local carriers before coding.
2. There are three types of consultative visits: initial, subsequent and confirmatory. For consultant visits following the initial visit, the subsequent visit codes (99232 - 99233) will be utilized. When the consultant has initiated treatment at the initial consult and participates thereafter in the patient's management (taken over the care) the subsequent visit codes will be utilized. Follow-up consult visits (99261 - 99263) mean the consultant's visit is to complete the consult or are subsequent consultative visits requested by the attending and include follow-up monitoring and recommending modifications or advising on a new plan of care. For confirmatory consults, 99261 - 99263 will be utilized. [99271 - 99275 can be used in any setting. However, the use of these codes should be limited to only those instances where the attending or patient has asked for another opinion.]
3. Consults vs. Visits: You can initiate treatment and bill for a consult on the same day. A transfer of care does not occur until the referring physician "transfers responsibility for the patient's complete care". Per *HCFA, Transmittal No. 1644*, instructs all carriers to pay for an initial consultation if all the criteria for a consultation are satisfied. Payment may be made regardless of treatment initiation unless a transfer of care occurs. A transfer of care occurs when the referring physician transfer the responsibility for the patient's complete care to the receiving physician at the time of referral, and the receiving physician documents approval of care in advance. The receiving physician would report a new or established patient visit depending on the situation.
4. Consultations can be paid for pre-op clearance associated with a surgery provided that the consultation requirements are met.
5. Effective August 26, 1999, HCFA issued clarification and alterations which result in major changes to the way physicians are allowed to report consultations.
  - A consultation is an opinion and must be requested by a physician or other appropriate source.
  - This request must be documented in the patient's medical record.
  - The opinion must be communicated, in writing, to the referring physician or appropriate source. The consulting physician may initiate diagnostic and or therapeutic services in order to formulate the opinion.

**E. Critical Care Admissions**

1. For patients admitted to critical care, the codes 99291 (30 minutes to 74 minutes of critical care) and 99292 (each additional 30 minutes) are to be used for the care of the unstable critically ill or unstable critically injured patients who require constant physician attendance.
2. If the total duration of critical care provided by the physician is less than 30 minutes, the appropriate evaluation and management code, e.g., 99232, 99233 should be used. Services for a patient who is not critically ill but happens to be in the critical care unit are reported using subsequent hospital care codes (99231 - 99233).
3. Subsequent visits documented by attending physicians will be coded.
4. If critical care is required upon presentation to the emergency department, only critical care codes (99291 - 99292) may be reported. Emergency department codes will not be paid when billed with the same date of service as critical care.
5. If there is a hospital visit early in the day and at that time the patient does not require critical care, but the patient requires critical care later in the day, both the critical care and the hospital visit may be paid.

6. Critical care cannot be paid on the day the physician also bills a procedure code with a global surgical period unless the critical care is billed with the CPT modifier 25 (pre-operative) and -24 (post-operative) to indicate that the critical care is a significant, separately identifiable evaluation and management service that is above and beyond the usual pre- and post-operative care associated with the procedure that is performed. An ICD-9 code in the range of 800.00-959.9 (except 930-939) is acceptable documentation by Medicare that the critical care was unrelated to the surgery.
7. Both primary physician and intensivist services can be covered on the same day provided there is a written request for the intensivist's services by the primary physician; the intensivist bills for a consultation or critical care but not both; and the record justifies payment to the primary physician by documentation which supports significant or a substantial contribution to the patient's care.
8. Only one physician may bill for a given hour of critical care even if more than one physician is providing care to the critically ill patient. There are no absolute limits on the numbers of critical care services that can be billed per day or per hospital stay.

**F. Deaths**

Use the CPT codes 99238 - 99239 when the staff physician pronounces the patient dead, completes the death summary, and talks with the deceased patient's family. The note will not be coded if a resident pronounces the patient dead. In cases where the MOD is a staff physician and pronounces the patient dead and the attending physician completes the death summary, code 99238 or 99239 using the documentation from both staff physicians. List the attending staff physician as the primary physician for billing purposes.

*(Reference: CPT Assistant Volume 8, Issue 3, March 1998)*

**G. Transfer/Discharge Codes**

The discharge date should also be abstracted and coded to reflect the total amount of time spent by a physician on the discharge of a patient. This is a time-driven E&M code. There are two codes to choose from:

- 99238 - Hospital discharge day management: 30 minutes or less
- 99239 - Hospital discharge day management: More than 30 minutes

Since time is an issue for discharge codes, assign the lowest code unless the time is available.

**XI. SURGERY CODING GUIDELINES**

**A. Ancillary Services**

Ancillary services such as radiology, laboratory and EKGs, are not included in the surgical global package and should be coded separately.

**B. Assistant at Surgery**

Some surgical procedures require a primary surgeon and an assistant surgeon. Payment will not be made for the services of assistants at surgery furnished in a teaching hospital which has a training program related to the medical specialty required for the surgical procedure and has a qualified resident available to perform the service. Modifier 80 or 82 is required.

**C. Co-Surgery**

Co-surgery refers to a single surgical procedure which requires the skill of two surgeons (usually with different skills) of the same or different specialties performing parts of the same procedure simultaneously. Co-surgery has been performed if the procedure(s) performed is part of and would be billed under the same surgical code. Modifier -62 is required for each surgeon.

**D. Follow-up Visits to a Non-surgeon**

Each surgery has a follow-up visit at either 0, 10 or 90 days (see Federal Register volume 64, No. 211, dated 11/2/99). This rule applies when these services are performed by a surgeon or surgery assistant. If a primary care physician does the follow-up then a modifier should be appended to show that this is separate from the original surgery. A modifier would be attached to the surgery code as well as the follow-up visit. For example, 99213 should have a modifier -55 to show that the follow-up is by other than the surgeon.

**E. History and Physical**

CPT guidelines indicate a history and physical performed by the surgeon or assistant surgeon within the 24-hour pre-operative period is included in the surgery code. Post-operative visits within the CPT post-operative global period are included in the surgery code.

**Note:** VHA directives do not follow the above guidelines and call for separate coding for all ambulatory care visits. Pre-operative visits should be coded with a CPT code that reflects the level of service provided. Post-operative visits should be coded using CPT code 99024 if within the established global period. Reusing the surgical procedure code is not valid.

**F. Global Surgical Package**

1. The payment for a surgical procedure includes a standard package of preoperative, intraoperative, and postoperative services. The preoperative period included in the global fee for **major** surgery is 1 day. The postoperative period for **major** surgery is 90 days. The postoperative period for **minor** surgery is either 0 or 10 days depending on the procedure. For endoscopic procedures (except procedures requiring an incision), there is no postoperative period.
2. Visits to a patient in an intensive care or critical care unit are also included if made by the surgeon within this global surgical package.
3. The following services **are** included in the payment amount for a global surgery:
  - Preoperative Visits – Preoperative visits after the decision is made to operate beginning with the day before the day of surgery for major procedures and the day of surgery for minor procedures.
  - Intraoperative Services – Intraoperative services that are normally a usual and necessary part of a surgical procedure.
  - Complications Following Surgery – All additional medical or surgical services required of the surgeon during the postoperative period of the surgery because of complications which do not require additional trips to the operating room.
  - Postoperative Visits – Follow-up visits within the postoperative period of the surgery that is related to recovery from the surgery.
  - Postsurgical Pain Management – By the surgeon.
4. The following services **are not** included in the payment amount for a global surgery:
  - The initial consultation or evaluation of the problem by the surgeon to determine the need for surgery.

- Services of other physicians except where the surgeon and the other physician(s) agree on the transfer of care.
  - Visits unrelated to the diagnosis for which the surgical procedure is performed, unless the visits occur due to complication of the surgery.
  - Treatment for the underlying condition or an added course of treatment which is not part of the normal recovery from surgery.
  - Clearly distinct surgical procedures during the postoperative period which are not re-operations or treatment for complications (A new postoperative period begins with the subsequent procedure.)
  - Treatment for postoperative complications which requires a return trip to the operating room.  
(Reference: Medicare Part B Reference Manual Chapter 22 Global Surgery Services)
5. Not all procedures include a global surgery package. These include relatively small surgical services that involve a readily identifiable surgical procedure but may include variable preoperative and postoperative services. Because of the indefinite pre and postoperative services the usual package concept for surgical services cannot be applied. Such procedures are identified by a star (\*) following the procedure code. The following rules apply to starred procedure codes:
- a) The service, as listed, includes the surgical procedure only. Associated pre and postoperative services are not included in the service as listed.
  - b) Preoperative services are considered as one of the following:
    - When the starred (\*) procedure is carried out at the time of an initial visit (new patient) and this procedure constitutes the major service at that visit, procedure number 99025 is listed in lieu of the usual initial visit as an additional service.
    - When the starred procedure is carried out at the time of an initial or established patient visit involving significant identifiable services, the appropriate visit is listed with the modifier –25 in addition to the starred procedure and its follow-up care.
    - When the starred procedure requires hospitalization, an appropriate hospital visit is listed in addition to the starred procedure and its follow-up care.
6. Non-Global Preoperative Services. Consists of evaluation and management (E/M) services (preoperative examinations) that are not included in the global surgical package and diagnostic tests performed for the purpose of evaluating a patient's risk of perioperative complications and optimizing perioperative care. Preoperative examinations may be billed by using an appropriate CPT code (e.g., new patient, established patient, or consultation). Such non-global preoperative examinations are payable if they are medically necessary. All claims for preoperative medical examination and preoperative diagnostic tests must be accompanied by the appropriate ICD-9 code for preoperative examination (V72.81 through V72.84). Additionally, the appropriate ICD-9 code for the condition(s) that prompted surgery must also be documented on the claim. Reference: Medicare Carrier Manual Transmittal 1701

#### **G. Multiple Procedures**

Multiple surgeries are separate procedures performed by a physician on the same patient at the same operative session or on the same day. Multiple surgeries are distinguished from procedures that are components of or incidental to a primary procedure. A modifier should be utilized to reflect multiple procedures. Intraoperative services, incidental surgeries or components of surgeries will not be separately reimbursed.

**H. Office Visit and Ambulatory Procedure**

The charge for an office visit (E&M code) is included in the charge for a minor office surgery. An office visit can be billed separately when the visit is for a separate, unrelated, diagnosis or condition. In these cases, modifier-25 must be used with the appropriate E&M visit code.

**I. Pre/Post-Op Consultations and Follow-up**

A primary care physician or specialist who performs a pre-operative consultation for a new or established patient at the request of the surgeon may code the encounter as a consultation as long as it meets *consultation* criteria. The surgeon's request must be documented in the medical record, as well as the consultant's opinion. The consultation request must not be for *convenience* or *routine*. Any follow-up care should be coded using the appropriate follow-up E&M visit code (not a subsequent consultation code).

**J. Surgical Trays**

Certain procedures allow the billing of supplies in addition to the procedure itself. When a separate payment is allowed, use code A4550 or 99070 for a surgical supply tray used during the course of a procedure. Note that only one tray can be billed regardless of the number used.

**K. Suture Removal**

Suture removal coding also differs from CPT ground rules and VHA guidelines. CPT ground rules require that sutures removed by the surgeon to be included in the global surgery fee. In contrast, VHA encounters for suture removal by a physician other than the surgeon should be coded with CPT code 99212. If done by the surgeon, it would be coded with the appropriate level of service. Suture removal by nurses and other ancillary personnel are coded 99211.

**L. Team Surgery**

Team surgery refers to a single procedure; however, it requires the skills of more than two surgeons of different specialties, working together to carry out various portions of a complicated surgical procedure. Modifier 66 is required for each surgeon.

**M. Visits in Conjunction with Ambulatory Surgery**

VHA guidelines for pre- and post-surgery visits differ from CPT ground rules and Medicare HCFA guidelines and will supersede these. The ACD Policy Board will monitor VHA policy as it relates to this discrepancy and will update the policy as appropriate.

**XII. CODING GUIDELINES FOR OTHER PROFESSIONALS**

**A. Audiologists**

1. The medical record should show that audiologic services are reasonable and necessary. Diagnostic services for the purpose of fitting a hearing aid may not be covered by some insurance carriers. Treatment services (e.g. hearing aid services) should be provided separately from diagnostic services.

2. ICD-9-CM should be used for coding diagnoses. All conditions found to be present after diagnostic evaluation should be coded. When the purpose of the encounter is for treatment, only the condition treated should be coded. When the purpose of an encounter is for the fitting or adjustment of a hearing aid or assistive listening device, V53.2 should be coded as the primary diagnosis. In those instances where normal function is found after study, V71.89 should be coded secondary in addition to the chief complaint. V65.2 should be coded when the patient is feigning (pretending) but hearing is found to be normal. For encounters involving both treatment and fitting/adjustment for the hearing aid, code the hearing diagnosis as primary.
3. Diagnostic and treatment services are reported using the 92500-series CPT codes are reportable by independent audiologist and are used to report diagnostic and treatment services. Evaluation and management services (99201 to 99499) will not be coded for audiologists except for 99211, telephone services (99371-99373), and compensation and pension services (99455-99456).
4. HCPCS Level II codes (V5008-V5299) are typically used to describe services related to the fitting of a hearing aid, with the exception of codes V5088 and V5299. As these codes are used by DSS for costing purposes, their use is encouraged. Ear impression (V5275) is coded when taken as a separate service. When ear impressions are taken as part of a hearing aid evaluation, the service should not be coded. Ear impression services are included in hearing aid evaluations (92590 and 92591). V5275 will be coded for each impression taken.
5. In addition to CPT codes in the 92500-series, the following codes are appropriate for use if the audiologist is privileged to provide the service: 69210 (removal impacted cerumen), 92270 (electro-oculography with interpretation and report), and 95920 (intraoperative neurophysiology testing) . If 95920 is coded, the study performed should also be coded (e.g. 92585, auditory evoked potentials).
6. Code 97703 will be coded for training and orientation for hearing prosthetic devices.
7. The use of vertical channel in electronystagmography (ENG) is coded to 92547. This code is used only once to indicate the vertical channel was used in the ENG test battery. It is not appropriate to code 92547 as an add-on to each component of an ENG test battery 92541, 92542, 92543, 92544, and 92545 even though the vertical channel may have diagnostic significance.

**B. Chaplains**

Code “99499” will be used to capture chaplain visits. Chaplain services are non-billable.

**C. Compensated Work Therapy Services (CWTS)**

A manner of effecting change through the application of clinical skills and/or services that attempt to improve function. Physician or therapist is required to have direct one-on-one patient contact. Assign code 97545 for work conditioning, initial two (2) hours. Assign code 97546 for each additional hour (list separately in addition to code for primary procedures). Use 97546 in conjunction with 97545.

**D. Dental**

Assign Level II (HCPCS) "D" codes for dental procedures.

**E. Home Health**

1. Training and education of the home health patient is included in the code for the actual home visit. A separate code would not be used to include education.

2. Counseling and coordination of care is also included in the home visit. A separate code will not be used to include counseling and coordination of care. If counseling and coordination of care constitutes more than 50% of the encounter, then time is the dominant factor in determining the level of care. Documentation of this counseling and coordination of care must be in the medical record.
3. Telephone calls made to a patient will be recorded only as 99371, 99372 or 99373, which are telephone calls. No other CPT code will be used for talking to a patient on the telephone. These telephone codes incorporate education, training, and coordination of care. No other Evaluation and Management code will be used with a telephone CPT code.
4. Interdisciplinary 90-day summary is performed on home health patients on a regular basis to review current medical treatment and evaluate possible changes to the treatment plan. Interdisciplinary providers (dietitian, pharmacist, social worker, and home health nurse) meet under the supervising provider.

The following elements are always reviewed:

- (1) Problems (lab or x-ray results),
- (2) Medications,
- (3) Psychosocial situation, and
- (4) Diet.

This 90-day summary will **not** be coded with CPT or ICD-9-CM codes. The medical record must contain evidence that the summary took place and that there was medical necessity and medical decision-making involved in the summary meeting.

5. For patients who have been scheduled for a home health visit, but who are not home when the Home Health Nurse arrives at the appointed time, **will not be** coded using CPT or ICD-9-CM codes. However, the attempt to make the visit will be documented in the medical record.
6. As of January 1, 1998, 99375 will be used for care plan oversight for Home Health and 99378 for Hospice instead of the HCPCS codes G0064 and G0065.
7. Medicare requires home care agencies to use HCFA Common Procedure Coding Systems (HCPCS) not CPT codes for home care billings. There are specific codes for each discipline, including home health aides. New reporting codes were implemented July 1, 1999. These include "service units" that code the visits according to 15 minute increments of time "spent actively treating the beneficiary". (Please refer to Medicare Transmittal for further information.)

***Medicare Transmittal No. A-99-6 Date FEBRUARY 1999***

***Change Request 588***

***SUBJECT: Information Requirements for Home Health Services -- 15 Minute Increment Reporting***

***Definition of Service Visit:***

*The term "home health services" means the following. They must be services furnished to an eligible individual, who is under the care of a physician, by a home health agency (HHA) or by others who are under arrangement with such agencies, in accordance with a plan of care established by the physician. Services must be periodically provided on a visiting basis and in an approved place of residence such as the individual's home. A visit is defined as an encounter of personal contact with the patient by the staffs of the HHA, or others who are under arrangements with the HHA, for purposes of providing a covered home health service.*

Instructions to Providers: Use the HCFA Common Procedure Coding System to Report 15 Minute Increments for each visit in each discipline, there must be a numeric code that identifies the discipline and records the elapsed time of the visit in 15 minute increments. HCFA Common Procedure Coding System (HCPCS) codes should be used to identify the visit and report the 15 minute increments. The codes below should be used for bill types 32x and 33x (home health services under a plan of care).

Six new HCPCS codes have been created to identify the services of each discipline, each indicating 15 minute units of service that are being reported. Reporting of 15 minute increments as required in this Program Memorandum in no way affects the reporting of 15 minute increments for outpatient rehabilitation services or physical therapy visits (revenue code 421) report the following code:

G0151 services of physical therapist under a home health plan of care, each 15 minutes

For occupational therapy visits (revenue code 431) report the following code:

G0152 services of occupational therapist under a home health plan of care, each 15 minutes

For speech-language pathology visits (revenue code 441) report the following code:

G0153 services of speech and language pathologist under a home health plan of care, each 15 minutes

For skilled nursing visits (revenue code 551) report the following code:

G0154 services of skilled nurse under a home health plan of care, each 15 minutes

For medical social services visits (revenue code 561) report the following code:

G0155 services of clinical social worker under a home health plan of care, each 15 minutes

For home health aide visits (revenue code 571) report the following code:

G0156 services of home health aide under a home health plan of care, each 15 minutes

Time of Service Visit:

The timing of the service visit will begin:

- 1) At the beneficiaries' place of residence; and
- 2) When delivery of services has actively begun.

Time during a service visit does not include:

- 1) Time incurred during travel to and from the beneficiaries' place of residence; or
- 2) Time used for administrative services and/or duties.

The time counted should be time spent actively treating the beneficiary. For example, if a beneficiary interrupts a treatment to talk on the telephone for other than an minimal amount of time (less than 3 minutes), then the time the beneficiary spends on the telephone and not engaged in therapy does not count in the amount of service. Other non-treatment related interruptions would follow the same principle. If the beneficiary is late returning home from a doctor's appointment, the waiting time of the home health agency personnel also cannot be counted as treatment time.

3

If the professional spends time with the family or other caretakers in the home teaching them to care for the beneficiary, this activity is counted as treatment time. If the nurse calls the physician to report on the beneficiary's condition while in the beneficiary's home, this can also be counted as treatment time.

Counting of 15 Minute Increments

*When counting the number of 15 minute intervals, do not report services lasting less than 8 minutes. Time intervals for larger numbers of units are as follows:*

*1 unit ≥ 8 minutes to < 23 minutes*

*2 units ≥ 23 minutes to <38 minutes*

*3 units ≥ 38 minutes to <53 minutes*

*4 units ≥ 53 minutes to <68 minutes*

*5 units ≥ 68 minutes to <83 minutes*

*6 units ≥ 83 minutes to <98 minutes*

*7 units ≥ 98 minutes to <113 minutes*

*8 units ≥ 113 minutes to <128 minutes* The pattern continues for longer periods of time.

#### **F. Hospice**

Code V66.7, Encounter for palliative care, was created to classify encounters for end-of-life care, hospice care and terminal care. Code V66.7 **may not** be used as the principal diagnosis. Sequence first the underlying disease, such as carcinoma, etc. Code V66.7 may be assigned as an additional code to identify patients who receive palliative care in any health care setting, including a hospital

#### **G. Mental Health Services**

1. Mental Health Services use ICD-9-CM codes (295 through 316) to classify mental disorders. CPT codes relating to mental health are found in the Psychiatry Subsection of the medicine Section. The codes are based on type of psychotherapy, whether E&M services were provided, face to face time, and place of service.
2. Caution must be given prior to using any codes identifying **interactive** psychotherapy (90810-90815). The physician provides **individual** interactive psychotherapy using play equipment, physical devices, a language interpreter, and other mechanism of communication. It involves the use of physical aids and non-verbal communication to overcome barriers to therapeutic interaction between the clinician and a patient who has not yet developed, or has lost, either the expressive language communication skills to explain his/her symptoms and response to the clinician if he/she were to use ordinary adult language for communication.
3. The American Medical Association (AMA) defines psychotherapy as:
  - the development of insight or affective understanding
  - the use of behavior modification techniques
  - the use of supportive interactions
  - the use of cognitive discussion of reality

or the combination of any of the above to provide therapeutic change. Thus, the clinician establishes a professional contract with the patient and, through definitive therapeutic communication, attempts to alleviate the emotional disturbances, reverse or change maladaptive patterns of behavior, and encourage personality growth and development.

4. To report medical E&M services that are provided on a day when psychotherapy is **not** provided, use the E&M codes listed under "Office or Other Outpatient Services". If psychotherapy was provided, assign the appropriate psychotherapy with E&M code from the Psychiatry Subsection.
5. The Evaluation and Management services should not be reported separately, when reporting codes 90805, 90807, 90809, 90817, 90819, 90822, 90824, 90827, 90829.

6. The consultation for psychiatric evaluation includes patient examination, exchange of information with the primary physician and other informants (i.e., nurses, family members), and preparation of a report. These consultative services (99241 - 99263) are limited to initial or follow-up evaluation and do not include psychiatric treatment.
7. Pharmacological management (90862) includes prescription use and review of medication with no more than minimal medical psychotherapy. This code includes provision of minimal medical psychotherapy, and should be assigned alone when this is the only service actually performed. Pharmacological management (90862) is bundled into the psychiatric diagnostic interview exam (90801). 90862 is a psychiatric service code **only** and it stands alone without E&M code accompaniment.  
(Reference: Physician Practice Coder Vol. #5, No. 7, July 1999)
8. Other psychiatric procedures performed in addition to E&M services or psychotherapy, such as electroconvulsive therapy should also be coded.
9. Certified Addiction Therapist/Rehab Counselors: Professional services may only be covered if they meet the guidance provided by Medicare and if they are a MD, CP, CSW or CNS.
10. Code “90801” is for initial diagnostic assessment and generally can only be used once, at the outset of an illness or suspected illness. It may be utilized again for the same patient if a new episode of illness occurs after a hiatus, or on admission, or re-admission, to inpatient status due to complications of the underlying condition. All “individual psychotherapy” codes must have time spent with patient documented within their notes.
11. Psychological testing is based on time spent by the psychologist which includes the administration, scoring, and the writing of the report along with time spent face-to-face with the patient.
12. Group Therapy: Individual notes are required for each patient along with the number of patients in the group. A psychiatrist, clinical psychologist, clinical nurse specialist, or clinical social worker needs to be in a group therapy session the entire time if run by a resident.
13. Addiction Severity Index (ASI) is used during intake to assess the patient and is normally a part of the Evaluation and Management service delivery when done by a physician. If the ASI is used by other providers, the appropriate CPT code is 96100 in the initial assessment period.  
(Reference: the Revenue Office Fast Track, June 2000)
14. Mental Health codes, without a timed increment, should not be reported in multiples.

**NOTE: For more in-depth information on Mental Health, use of CPT codes by providers, please refer to the “Mental Health Fact Sheet”. This can be retrieved off the Reasonable Charges web page.**

#### **H. Optometrists/Ophthalmologists**

1. Medicare will pay optometrists for either the CPT evaluation and management codes (99201 - 99300 and 99304 - 99499) or the CPT general ophthalmologic service codes (92002 - 92014). Medicare will pay ophthalmologists for either the CPT evaluation and management codes (99201 - 99499) or the CPT general ophthalmologic service codes (92002 - 92014).
2. It is important to note that there is no mandate that states the ophthalmology codes (non-vested codes) must be used instead of the evaluation and management codes. The codes that most accurately identify the service(s) or procedure(s) performed should be used.  
(Reference: CPT Assistant, Volume 8, Issue 8, August 1998)
3. Evaluation and Management codes should not be used in conjunction with 92012 and 92014.

4. Payment for other services such as fitting, follow-up, and other similar services that are directly related to the furnishing of the eyeglasses or contact lenses is included in the payment for the glasses and contact lenses. Separate payment cannot be made for such a service, whether furnished by an ophthalmologist, an optometrist, or an optician.
5. Determination of a refractive state (92015) is not included in a comprehensive ophthalmological service. This is to be coded separately.
6. If an optometry resident is licensed in the State in which the service is performed and he or she is authorized to perform such services in that State, his or her services are covered as physicians' services payable under the physician fee schedule. Reference: CMS letter (FAR-065 dated March 14, 2000) from Robert A. Berenson, M.D., Director, Center for Health Plans and Providers to Henry J. Wirth, O.D., US Department of Health and Human Services, Gallup, New Mexico

**I. Pharmacists**

Whether the services provided by clinical pharmacists are reimbursable is a carrier specific determination. The code ranges nationally recognized for clinical pharmacists are limited to 99211 and G0108 and G0109.

**J. Rehabilitation (OT, PT)**

1. Services are covered when:
  - The therapy is performed to restore the patient's level of function which has been lost or reduced by illness or injury;
  - The therapy is reasonable and necessary for the treatment of a patient's condition;
  - There is expectation that the patient's condition or level of functioning will improve significantly in a reasonable and generally predictable period of time.
2. Services related to the general good and welfare of the patients, e.g., general exercises to promote overall fitness and flexibility and activities to provide diversion or general motivation, **do not** constitute physical therapy services. Palliative services provided solely for pain relief is not considered physical therapy.
3. Evaluation and management services performed on the same day for the same patient must be medically necessary. The patient's medical record must clearly document that a separate E/M service was performed in addition to the treatment.
4. Claims for specific rehab must indicate procedures or modalities performed and the appropriate ICD-9 diagnosis code must be indicated. When using procedure code 97039, 97139 or 97799 (unlisted physical medicine/rehabilitation service), a description of the service or procedure is required.
  - **Supervised Modalities** - The application of a modality that does not require direct (one on one) patient contact by the provider: 97010, 97012, 97014, 97016, 97018, 97020, 97022, 97024, 97026, 97028
  - **Constant Attendance Modality** - The application of a modality that requires direct (one-on-one) patient contact by the provider: 97032, 97033, 97034, 97035, 97036, 97039
  - **Therapeutic Procedures** - Require one-on-one patient contact: 97110, 97112, 97113, 97116, 97124, 97139, 97140, 97150, 97504, 97520, 97530, 97532, 97533, 97537, 97542, 97545, 97546
  - **Office Procedures** - When performing PT evaluations and reevaluations: 97001, 97002
  - **Tests and Measurements** - 97703, 97750
  - **EMG & Nerve Conduction Tests** - Technical and Professional Components: 95860, 95861, 95863, 95864, 95867, 95868, 95869
  - **EMG & Nerve Conduction Tests** - Technical Component Only: 95900, 95904, 95920, 95925, 95926, 95927, 95933, 95934, 95936, 95937

- **Neuromuscular Testing and Range of Motion** - 95831, 95832, 95833, 95834, 95851, 95852, 95857, 95858
  - **Occupational therapy evaluation** - 97003
  - **Occupational therapy re-evaluation** - 97004
  - **Occupational therapist may report the following physical medicine procedures** - 97010-97039, 97110-97799
5. Hot/Cold Packs (97010): The service of applying hot/cold packs is now considered to be a "bundled" service both for hospital technical services and also physician services and are not separately coded.
  6. Rehab codes, without a timed increment, should not be reported in multiples.

**K. Social Workers**

1. Licensed, independent social workers that do not meet the Medicare or VHA criteria for clinical social workers are limited in use of AMA CPT codes. Clinical social workers recognized by Medicare may use specific CPT and HCPCS codes for services rendered and bill Medicare and most insurance companies that follow Medicare guidelines.
2. VHA Social Work Service adopted the Event Capture System (ECS) to capture inpatient and outpatient workload. The Directory of Nationally Accepted Procedures, VHA Social Work Event Capture System/Decision Support Date Entry 2001 document establishes a national standard for DSS workload entry using a system of DSS identifiers and Social Work Intermediate Product Numbers that are cross referenced to CPT/HCPCS codes, available on the Social Work website:  
<http://vaww.va.gov/socialwork>.

**L. Speech Pathology**

1. Speech pathology services must reflect frequency, duration and treatment modalities. Speech pathology services are those services necessary for the diagnosis and treatment of speech and language disorders that result in communication disabilities and for the diagnosis and treatment of swallowing disorders (dysphagia), whether or not a communication disorder exists. Speech pathology services are appropriate for the evaluation and management of:
  - Cerebrovascular disease manifesting dysphagia, apraxia, or aphasia
  - Neurological disease manifesting dysarthria, dysphagia, voice, or fluency disturbances
  - Trauma (e.g., subdural hematoma influencing the speech or language)
  - Congenital anomalies (e.g. cleft palate and lip)
  - Prostheses related to surgical management (e.g., fitting and training for electrolarynges or tracheoesophageal voice prostheses following a laryngectomy)
2. Speech pathology services are not medically appropriate treatment for the following diagnoses:
  - Psychosocial speech delay
  - Behavior problems (including impulsive behavior and impulsivity syndrome)
  - Attention disorder
  - Conceptual handicap
  - Mental retardation
3. ICD-9-CM should be used for coding diagnoses. All conditions found to be present after diagnostic evaluation should be coded. When the purpose of an encounter is for treatment, only the condition treated should be coded. When the purpose of an encounter is to fit or adjust a speech or voice prosthesis, V52.8 should be coded. When the purpose of the encounter is for speech therapy, V57.3 should be coded. Both V codes may be used as the primary diagnosis. V57.3 always requires a secondary diagnosis to explain medical necessity. In those instances where normal function is found after study, V71.89 should be coded in addition to the chief complaint.

4. Diagnostic and treatment services are reported using the 92500-series CPT codes. Evaluation and management services (99201 to 99499) will not be coded for speech pathologists except for 99211 and telephone services (99371-99373).
5. HCPCS Level II codes (V5336-V5364) may be used as appropriate. V5336 is used for repairs and modifications to speech generating devices (augmentative or alternative communication devices). These devices do not include voice prostheses, hearing aids, assistive listening devices, or cochlear implants. Modifications or repairs to hearing aids or assistive listening devices are coded as V5014. Repairs or modifications to voice prostheses are coded as G0201. The following codes may be used for costing purposes: A4481, A4621 to A4626, and A4629, and L8501. Reference: Coding Council and Coding Handbook for Audiology and Speech Pathology, V2.01
6. In addition to CPT codes in the 92500-series, the following codes are appropriate for use if the speech pathologist is privileged to provide the service and inserts the endoscope or laryngoscope: 31505, 92511. If the purpose of the exam is to assess swallowing function, code G0193-G0196 in addition to the instrument code. CPT code 74230 is not appropriate for use unless the speech pathologist is privileged to perform the procedure. The following code is appropriate for use 96105, 97532, and 97533.
7. Code 97703 will be coded for training and orientation for speech, voice, and augmentative prosthetic devices.
8. Use of CPT 92597 and 92598 will be replaced by G0197-G0201.

**Note:** Per Dr. Kyle Dennis, 92525 will no longer be used to code swallowing evaluations per the November 1, 2000, Federal Register (Vol. 65, No. 212, 65426-65427)

### **XIII. SPECIAL SCREENING/VHA PROGRAMS CODING GUIDELINES**

#### **A. Blood Pressure Screening**

1. A blood pressure taken by the nurse or doctor during an encounter is included as part of the evaluation and management visit code.
2. Coding for 24 hour ambulatory blood pressure: This is utilizing a system such as magnetic tape and/or computer disk, for 24 hours or longer, including recording, scanning, analysis, interpretation, and reporting.
  - To describe the visit, which initiated the monitoring on the first day, use 99211 if no physician is involved,
  - 99212 if a physician sees the patient, and the appropriate procedure code for the second visit.
  - Use 93786 to describe the recording; use 93790 for the interpretation, and
  - Use 93788 for the scanning analysis.
  - To describe the entire process, use code 93783.

The second encounter on the next day will be the code describing the appropriate procedure from the above choices. *Do not use 93784 for routine blood pressure monitoring*

#### **B. Compensation and Pension Exams**

1. For life insurance or disability insurance exams, code 99450. This code applies to new and established patients. When using this code, no treatment or management is performed. The basic life or disability examination includes measurement of height, weight and blood pressure, completion of medical history following life insurance *pro forma*, collection of blood or urine sample following chain of custody protocol, and report and documentation. The use of this code would be appropriate for physician staffs who are asked to fill out a life insurance policy and disability statement for a patient.

2. Compensation and pension services performed by the **treating physician** is coded as 99455. This code applies to new and established patients. When using this code, no treatment or management is performed. Compensation and pension exams include medical history, examination, formulation of diagnosis, assessment of disability and stability and calculation of impairment, development of treatment plan if appropriate, and report and documentation.
3. Compensation and pension services performed by **other than the treating physician** is coded as 99456. This code applies to new and established patients. When using this code, no treatment or management is performed. Compensation and pension exams include medical history, examination, formulation of diagnosis, assessment of disability and stability and calculation of impairment, development of treatment plan if appropriate, and report and documentation.
4. The code (99455 or 99456) may be used non-physicians performing compensation and pensions exams (e.g. audiologists, optometrists, podiatrists, or psychologists) based on your medical center's organizational structure. These codes are non-billable though physician specific.
5. Assign code V70.5 as the primary diagnosis. Secondary diagnoses may be added as appropriate.

**C. Computer Data Analysis/Medical Decision-Making**

This is a service that is usually part of an encounter coded with an E&M visit code. *Do not code for encounters.*

**D. AIDS/HIV+**

AIDS/HIV+ must be coded only when confirmed and specifically documented by the physician. Reference the following codes when assigning codes to document these diagnoses:

- V01.7 Patient exposed to HIV/AIDS
- V73.89 Patient requesting test for HIV/AIDS
- V65.44 Patient returns for results and is negative
- 795.71 Nonspecific serologic evidence with inconclusive test results
- V08 Patient confirmed HIV+
- 042 Patient with confirmed diagnosis and disease manifestations

**E. Injection Codes**

1. The coding of intramuscular (IM) and intravenous (IV) injections should be based on the following guidelines:

The drug administered and the dosage need to be specified. These are reflected in the terminology of the HCPCS "J" codes. "J" codes are used to indicate the name of the drug and the dosage.

Administration is part of the E&M code. If the injection is the only service performed by a non-physician, use 90782 for the administration of the injection and a "J" code to indicate the drug and dosage. If the E&M code 99211 is used, code 90782 would not be used. Each clinic/specialty will develop their own list of most common "J" codes.

2. TB Test (Intradermal PPD): The test is coded 86580. The follow-up visit for reading of the result is coded 99211.
3. Flu Vaccine: 90658, 90659, 90660, G0008 (without a physician's order).
4. Pneumonia Vaccine: 90732, G0009 (requires a physician's order).

5. In addition to the vaccine and toxoid codes (90476-90749), the administration immunization needs to be used (90471 or 90472). For example, the administration of four vaccines (DtaP, Polio, MMR and varicella vaccines) would be reported as follows 90471, 90472, 90472, 90572 used in addition to the vaccine codes 90700, 90713, 90707, and 90716. The administration of the vaccines in the above example can also be reported by listing 90471, and 90472 once with a number "3" in the units box on the claim form.

**F. Military Sexual Trauma (MST)**

The ICD-9-CM code (995.83), Adult Sexual Abuse, should be utilized for all patients reporting military sexual trauma. In addition to this code, additional codes to identify associated injuries and perpetrator (E967.x) may be used.

**G. Persian Gulf War Syndrome**

Gulf War Syndrome has not been assigned specific ICD-9 diagnosis codes. In the absence of specific diagnoses, code the symptoms or complaints using the 780-799 range of codes (fatigue, joint pain, headache, memory loss, abdominal pain, diarrhea, irregular temperatures, tumors, etc.). Additionally, use E999, Late effects of injury due to war operations. Do not assign the code 799.9, Other ill-defined and unknown causes of morbidity and mortality, since this is a non-specific code and does not reflect the patient's condition.

**H. PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder)**

Patients released following care and treatment (including rehabilitation) of PTSD will not be assigned a DXLS from the V57 category. When a patient is released from any ward, service or specialized unit following care and treatment (including rehabilitation) for PTSD, the DXLS will be coded as 308.3, acute post-traumatic stress disorder, or as 309.81, chronic post-traumatic stress disorder, as indicated by the physician responsible for the care of the patient.

**I. Respite Care**

Principal diagnosis code assignment for respite care patients is the condition responsible for the care of the patient. Code "V60.5" or "V60.4" is assigned as an additional code.

**J. Spinal Cord Injuries**

Patients qualify for this VERA Patient Class if they have a PTF ICD-9 primary or secondary diagnosis code of 344.1 - Other Paralytic Syndromes - Paraplegia

**AND**

One of the following PTF ICD-9 primary or secondary diagnoses codes:

806.0, 806.1, 806.2, 806.3, 806.5, 806.6, 952.0, or 952.1

**K. Stroke Patients**

A patient is included in the Stroke Patient Class under VERA in one of two ways:

- A primary diagnosis of stroke, CVA or occlusion (430.xx-436) followed by 438.xx late effect of cerebrovascular disease, or
- An ICD-9-CM diagnosis of 438.xx late effects of cerebrovascular disease (as either primary or secondary diagnosis) with one of the following primary conditions
- Aphasia (784.3)
- Dysphasia (784.5)
- Hemiplegia (342.0 - 342.9)

- Paraplegia (344.0 - 344.9)

#### **XIV. DIAGNOSIS/PROCEDURAL SPECIFIC CODING GUIDELINES**

##### **A. Anthrax**

1. There are three types of anthrax: cutaneous anthrax (022.0), inhalation anthrax (022.1), and gastrointestinal anthrax (022.2).
2. Currently there are no E codes for bioterrorism. An E code to reflect exposure to anthrax as an assault may be reported (E968.8, Assault by other specified means). Code E997.1, Injury due to war operations by nuclear weapons, biological warfare, is reserved for acts that take place as part of a declared war-that is, military action.
3. A confirmed case of anthrax is coded to Category 022 (Anthrax). If the patient had a confirmed exposure to anthrax without manifestation of the infection, use V01.8, Contact with or exposure to other communicable disease, as the primary diagnosis. If diagnostic test results are positive but the diagnosis of anthrax has not been confirmed, the abnormal finding should be reported (795.3, Nonspecific positive culture findings). If there is no exposure and the patient merely is worried, code V65.5, Person with feared complaint in whom no diagnosis is made.
4. Code V07.39, Other prophylactic chemotherapy, should be assigned as an additional code to report that the patient was placed on prophylactic antibiotic therapy. This code description is misleading at first glance but the alphabetic index clearly directs the coder to code V07.39 for prophylactic antibiotics. Reference: Journal of AHIMA, January 2002

##### **B. Asthma**

If a patient has asthma, avoid using ICD-9 code 493.9X. Find out if the patient has extrinsic asthma (caused by something in one's environment) which is coded as 493.0X; or if it's intrinsic asthma (caused by an internal mechanism or element within the body) which is coded as 493.1X. If a patient receives a nebulizer breathing treatment in the clinic and a bronchodilator medication is used, bill 94640 for the treatment as well as the HCPCS code for the drug. Alupent, which is commonly used, is coded as K0145.

##### **C. Cardiac Catheterization**

1. According to CPT, cardiac catheterizations include:
  - Introduction, positioning, and repositioning of the catheter(s).
  - Obtaining blood sample for measurement of blood gases or dilution curves and cardiac output measurements (Fick or other method, with or without rest and exercise and/or studies) with or without electrode placement.
  - Recording of intracardiac and intravascular pressure
  - Final evaluation and report of procedures.
2. Code the actual cardiac catheterization using a code from the 93501-93533 range, after making note of what these codes include (refer to above section). Reference: CPT Changes 2002
3. If injection procedure(s) are performed, select the appropriate code(s) from 93539-93545.
4. Next, codes from 93555-93556 are selected to report any "imaging supervision, interpretation and report for injection procedures during cardiac catheterization". Each code covers angiography of different structures. Read CPT's complete description for 93555-93556.

5. When multiple injection procedures are performed, report all of the applicable injection codes, but report the applicable S&I codes (93555-56) only once. Both 93555 and 93556 may be reported on the same bill as long as each code is reported only once.
6. Note: Codes 93561 and 93562 are not to be used with cardiac catheterization codes.

**D. Diabetes Mellitus**

1. Diagnostic coding for diabetes requires coding to the fifth digit. Select the appropriate four-digit code and add the appropriate fifth digit to your code as follows:
  - Non-insulin dependent diabetes mellitus
  - Insulin dependent diabetes mellitus
  - Non-insulin dependent, uncontrolled
  - Insulin dependent, uncontrolled

Then select the secondary diagnostic code that identifies the manifestation.

For example: 250.51 - DM with ophthalmic manifestations, insulin-dependent  
365.44 - Glaucoma

2. Do not code abnormal findings or diagnosis based on abnormal laboratory Value alone, i.e. do not assign a code for uncontrolled diabetes based on a high blood glucose reading. Uncontrolled diabetes occurs when blood sugars are not maintained at an acceptable level for the patient's particular treatment regimen. The physician must document uncontrolled within the record in order to code uncontrolled. Clinical indications as determined by the facility are to be used only to determine whether the physician should be contacted to add "uncontrolled diabetes mellitus" to the documentation.
3. Blood glucose levels may temporarily fluctuate due to surgery, nutritional status, or infection, and would not necessarily constitute "uncontrolled diabetes".
4. The administration of insulin has no bearing on code assignments as they relate to diabetes mellitus. Only the type of diabetes, (Type I or Type II) determines the code assignment. Do not code insulin-requiring diabetes as insulin dependent without specific documentation from the physician as to the type (I or II).
5. Never assume that a patient who is being treated with insulin is an insulin dependent diabetic. Some adult onset diabetes patients are given insulin to correct temporary deficiencies, but are not dependent on insulin to sustain life.
6. HCFA approved two G codes to be used by non physicians for approved diabetic programs, G0108 and G0109. These two codes can be used by nurses, dieticians and pharmacists.

**E. Health and Behavioral Assessments**

1. Health and Behavioral Assessment codes (96150-96155) are intended to be used by non-physician practitioners who have specialty or subspecialty training in the assessment and treatment for biopsychosocial factors affecting a patient's physical health problems. Codes are not to be used with a psychiatric diagnosis or represent a preventive medicine service.

2. This service identifies efforts to assess a patient's behavior and emotional state, as well as the cognitive and/or social factors that are important to the prevention, treatment, or management of the physical health problem. The focus of the assessment is not on mental health but on the biopsychosocial factors important to physical health problems and treatments.
3. These codes are intended to be reported according to the time spent providing these services. Therefore, documentation should include the total amount of time spent with the patient.
4. For patients that require psychiatric service (90801-90899) as well as health and behavior assessment/intervention (96150-96155), report the predominant service performed. Do not report these codes together on the same date. Please see various clinical vignettes in the CPT Assistant, Volume 12, Issue 3, March 2002.

**E. Outpatient Dialysis**

1. When the patient is seen as an outpatient for dialysis record the Monthly Capitation Payment (MCP) payment codes as appropriate. 90920 or 90921 is for the full month of ESRD related services and is an all-inclusive code for the month. Medicare requires a physician to round on each patient at least once during each billing cycle. The physician is not required to be present during each treatment. 90924 and 90925 are used per encounter, per day.
2. If the patient is admitted as an inpatient for no other reason than to receive maintenance dialysis, i.e. the only diagnosis is ESRD, the dialysis will be considered an outpatient service reimbursed under the MCP only.
3. CPT code (90999) will be used for the facility charge for hemodialysis

**F. Inpatient Dialysis**

1. Evaluation and management services for subsequent hospital visits (99231 - 99233) and follow-up inpatient consultations (99261 - 99263) will not be paid when billed on the same date of service by the same physician as inpatient dialysis (90935, 90937, 90945 and 90947).
2. Separate payment may be made for an initial hospital visit (99221 - 99223), an initial inpatient consultation (99251 - 99255) or a hospital discharge service (99238) when billed on the same date as an inpatient dialysis service. In order for the payment to be made, the E&M service must be unrelated to the treatment of the patient's ESRD and could not have been furnished during the dialysis treatment. These services should be billed with modifier -25 to indicate that they are significant, separately identifiable services.
3. When the patient is admitted, the physician can assign one of four CPT codes (90935, 90937, 90945, 90947) for care based on the following: If the physician sees the patient and there are no complications, the physician must sign the dialysis note and assign a CPT code of 90935 or 90945 depending on the type of dialysis.
  - If the physician repeatedly sees the patient for a problem, the problem/condition must be documented and the attending physician must assign a CPT code of 90937 or 90947, depending on the type of dialysis.
  - If the physician does not see the patient while the dialysis treatment is performed, the professional component will not be coded. The treatment will be coded by ICD-9-CM and will be part of the DRG.

**G. Malignant Lesions**

When a physician removes a malignant lesion, do not automatically code from the 11600-11646 section of the CPT book. Carefully review the documentation to see if the physician made a wide excision and if it was necessary to go into soft tissue. Codes from the Musculoskeletal section may more appropriately describe the service and the reimbursement rate is substantially higher. For example, the excision of a tumor of the hand or finger (subcutaneous) may be coded as 26115.

**H. Pain Management**

There are various types of pain procedures performed by anesthesiologists and other health care providers. These procedures can be coded using CPT-4:

- Joint Injections: 20600 – small joints (fingers & toes)  
20605 – medium joints (wrist, elbow & ankle)  
20610 – large joints (knee, SI joint)
- Trigger Point: 20550 – code each injection
- Common Injections: 64405 – occipital nerve block  
64415 – brachial plexus block  
64417 – axillary nerve block  
64425 – ilioinguinal/iliohypogastric block  
64510 – stellate ganglion block  
65520 – lumbar sympathetic block
- Nerve Blocks: 64420-64421 – intercostal nerve blocks  
4479-80 and 64483-64484 – paravertebral nerve blocks
- Lumbar Facet: 64475 – 1<sup>st</sup> level  
64476 – each additional level  
64622 – 1<sup>st</sup> level  
64623 – each additional level

If an injection occurs between levels, code only one level not two. Until a code for cervical facet joint is provided, use code “64999”.

**I. Tobacco**

A patient who currently uses tobacco products is coded to 305.1, Tobacco Use Disorder. A patient who has a past history of using tobacco products for one year or more is coded to V15.82. If the patient has stopped using tobacco products for less than one year, you would code the patient as a current user of tobacco. E869.4 should be used to identify nonsmokers who have been exposed to “second-hand smoke”. Reference: Guidance from VHA Office of Quality and Performance 04/02

**XV. CODING GUIDELINES BY BODY SYSTEM**

**A. Cardiovascular System - Arteriograms**

1. Determine the access site. This will be found in reading the radiology report.
2. Determine the injection site of the dye for the arteriogram. The coder will identify this by where the catheter is at the time of the injection.
3. If more than one injection occurs at different orders of the vascular system, code each separately.
4. If a non-selective catheterization is used for part of a service and that same access is converted to a selective catheter placement, the coder should only code the selective catheter placement.

5. If multiple selections for catheter placements are performed in different Vascular families, the coder will code to the highest level of selectivity for each Vascular family (see 36215-36217 and 36245-36247).
6. A Vascular family is defined as a group of vessels which is fed by a primary branch of the aorta, or a primary branch of the vessel that is to be punctured.
7. A non-selective catheterization is the point at which the catheter is initially introduced into the artery, is not moved or manipulated, or is negotiated only into the aorta from any approach.
8. A selective catheter placement means the catheter must be moved, manipulated or guided into a part of the arterial system other than the aorta or the vessel punctured and is the destination of the catheter for the arteriogram.
9. If two separate access procedures (two different punctures) were performed, each would be coded separately. A non-selective catheterization may be assigned for one puncture and a selective for the second puncture.

**B. Cardiovascular System - Miscellaneous**

1. Vascular procedures such as venipuncture are coded only if a physician inserts the catheter into the blood vessel.
2. A physician must supervise cardiac rehabilitation (93797-93798).
3. Codes 93000-93010 cover 12-lead or greater EKG's. Code 93000 covers the complete EKG service (physician owns the EKG equipment, interprets the EKG and dictates a report). Code 93005 covers only the recording. Code 93010 would cover the interpretation only.
4. Echocardiographies (99307-93350) differentiate between 2D, 2D transesophageal (TEE) or Doppler. Read descriptions 93325 and 93350 carefully. The complete TEE procedure is covered by 93312. Code 93313 is specific for placement of the probe only. Code 93314 covers the technical component along with the professional interpretation and a report. Code 93313-26 would describe a case where a physician only interpreted and reported TEE findings.

**C. Digestive System - Endoscopies**

1. For esophageal dilation without visualization, use codes 43450-43456.
2. Determine the route in coding colonoscopies
  - via colostomy (44388 – 44393)
  - via colotomy (45355)
  - via rectum (45378-45385)
3. All diagnostic endoscopies are "separate procedures" and should not be coded in addition to surgical endoscopies.
4. Endoscopy codes specify the type of instrument used, the purpose of the endoscopy and the site of application.
5. If during a colonoscopy, a polyp is removed and another area of the colon is biopsied, it is proper to code both procedures.
6. When coding endoscopies, distinguish between the following:
  - Proctosigmoidoscopy - exam of the rectum and sigmoid colon.

- Sigmoidoscopy – exam of the rectum, sigmoid colon and part of the descending colon.
- Colonoscopy – exam of the entire colon, from rectum to cecum and possible examination of terminal ileum.

**D. Digestive System - Hemorrhoidectomy/Fissurectomy**

1. For the codes 46255 (Hemorrhoidectomy internal and external, simple), 46257 (with or without Fissurectomy, with or without), and 46258 (fistulectomy), a simple Hemorrhoidectomy involves no plastic procedures as opposed to complex or extensive where plastic procedure is needed.
2. For the codes 46260 (hemorrhoidectomy, internal and external, complex or extensive), 46261 (with Fissurectomy) and 46262 (with fistulectomy with or without Fissurectomy), the need for a plastic procedure would indicate a complex or extensive Hemorrhoidectomy.
3. For the code 46270 (fistulectomy; subcutaneous), 46275 (fistulectomy; submuscular), and 46280 (fistulectomy; complex or multiple), submuscular fistulectomy involves division of the sphincter muscle as opposed to subcutaneous where muscle is not involved. Complex is excision of multiple fistulas.

**E. Digestive System -Miscellaneous**

1. Separate codes are not available for bilateral hernia repairs, use modifier -50.
2. Code selection for dilation of the esophagus depends on whether the procedure was a direct or indirect visualization and, if indirect, the dilation technique.
  - For direct visualization with a scope, the correct code is 43220; an additional code, 43226, is also reported if a wire is inserted to guide the dilation.
  - For indirect visualization, the method of dilation (i.e. unguided sound, bougie, guide wire, string, balloon, Starck or retrograde) must be known to determine the correct code from 43450 to 43456 range.

**F. Female Genital System - Laparoscopy/Hysteroscopy**

1. Surgical procedure performed via laparoscopy for both male and female will be found in this subsection.
2. A laparoscopy permits the visualization of the peritoneal cavity using a laparoscope through the anterior abdominal wall. The surgeon will make an incision at the inferior rim of the umbilicus. A needle is inserted into the abdominal cavity and carbon dioxide or nitrous oxide is insufflated to distend the abdominal wall. Additional incisions will be made so the surgeon can insert the laparoscope and any additional instruments for the procedure(s) being performed and visualization of the abdominal cavity.
3. The surgeon may also perform a pelviscopy. This procedure involves insertion of a fiberoptic scope through the abdominal wall. The difference between the pelviscopy and the laparoscopy is the pelviscopy is used for therapeutic procedures for the female genital system only.
4. The hysteroscopy is a direct visualization of the cervical canal and uterine cavity through a hysteroscope. This is performed to examine the endometrium and to perform a surgical procedure such as a D&C, removal of a foreign body, or removal of a cervical polyp. Again, the hysteroscopy is performed on female patients only.

5. CPT code 58660, laparoscopy with adhesions (salpingolysis, ovariolysis) has been designated as a separate procedure in 1998. If the surgeon performs lysis of adhesions in addition to a procedure on the ovaries and/or fallopian tubes, the coder will not code the lysis of adhesions separately. However, if the lysis of the adhesions are extensive and involve additional time in the OR, the adhesions are described as dense and adds increase risk to the patient, then coder may assign 58660.
6. When the surgeon performs a hysteroscopy with a D&C, coding guidelines indicate that CPT code 58558 will be assigned.
7. When a surgeon performs a laparoscopic procedure and CPT does not have a specific code for the procedure, the coder will assign the site specific “unlisted” laparoscopy/hysteroscopy procedure codes.

**G. Female Genital System - Miscellaneous**

1. The coder should determine the type of approach for the surgical procedure. Hysteroscopy and laparoscopy procedures will be assigned in the laparoscopy/hysteroscopy subsection. The remaining procedures will be listed in the female genital subsection.
2. The coder must identify the area of the female genital system that the procedure is being performed. CPT subdivides the vulva, perineum and introitus as one section, the Vagina as another section and the cervix uteri as another section. In addition, the uterus, oviduct (fallopian tube) and ovary have their own section within this subsection.
3. A nonobstetrical dilation and curettage (D&C) will be assigned 58120.
4. Do not code pelvic examination under anesthesia when performed in addition to a D&C. Assign code for D&C only.
5. LOOP Conization versus LEEP Conization of Cervix.
  - Coders will see surgeons use LOOP and LEEP interchangeably in operative reports.
  - LOOP – this electrodissection conization is a procedure that is a deep dissection of the cervix.
  - LEEP – this electrodissection conization is not as deep and therefore, is more superficial than the LOOP procedure.
  - The coder will assign 57522 regardless if the procedure is documented as a LOOP or a LEEP conization of the cervix.
  - If the LOOP or LEEP is performed via a culposcopy, the coder will assign CPT code 57460.

**H. Integumentary System - Removal of Lesions**

1. The following information is needed to accurately code the removal of lesions:
  - whether lesion is malignant or benign,
  - site or body part involved with lesion,
  - size of the lesion in centimeters before it is removed; when more than one dimension for a lesion is provided, select the largest dimension for coding,
  - method of removing the lesion, e.g., paring, shaving, debridement,
  - type of wound closure/repair: simple, intermediate, complete
  - repairs of the same classification and location should be added together and reported as a single item, and
  - re-excision of a malignant lesion performed to ensure all of the malignancy has been excised should be coded as an excision of a malignant lesion even if the lesion is no longer present.

<b>Assist your coding with this conversion chart</b>	
0.24 – 0.39 inch	0.6 – 1.0 cm

0.40 – 0.79	1.1 – 2.0
0.80 – 1.19	2.1 – 3.0
1.20 – 1.57	3.1 – 4.0
>1.57	>4.0
1.02 – 2.95	2.6 – 7.5
2.99 – 4.93	7.6 – 7.5
4.94 – 7.89	7.6 – 12.5
7.9 – 11.8	12.6 – 20.0
>11.8	>30
<b>The inches have been rounded for clarity. 1 inch = 2.54 centimeters; 1 centimeter = 0.3937008 inches.</b>	

2. The pathology report probably will give the size of the specimen, rather than the size of the lesion. However, you should only code the size of the specimen when the size of the lesion cannot be found in the operative report or elsewhere in the medical record. An asymmetrical or irregular lesion is measured by the maximum width of the lesion. The code for excision of a benign or malignant lesion includes simple closure.
3. Use more than one procedure code if the same procedure is performed on different anatomical sites with different incisions.
4. Shaving is the sharp removal by transverse incision or horizontal slicing to remove epidermal and superficial dermal lesions without a full-thickness dermal excision. This includes local anesthesia, chemical or electrocauterization of the wound. The wound does not require suture closure. See codes 11300-11313.
5. Simple repair refers to suturing of a superficial wound involving skin and/or subcutaneous tissues, without significant involvement of deeper structures. It includes local anesthesia and chemical or electrocauterization of wounds not closed. Do not assign a procedure code for application of Steri-Strips to close a wound.
6. Intermediate repair describes the repair of wounds that require layered closure. Deeper layers of such wounds are usually involved, such as superficial (non-muscle) fascia, so at least one of the layers requires separate closure. Remember that the use of two kinds of sutures do not indicate layered closure. Single-layer closure of contaminated wounds that have required extensive cleaning or removal of particulate matter also constitutes intermediate repair.
7. Complex repair describes the repair of wounds requiring reconstructive surgery (more than layered closure), complicated wound closure or unusual and time-consuming repair techniques to obtain the best functional and cosmetic result (i.e., scar revisions, debridement of traumatic or avulsed lacerations, extensive undermining or retention sutures). Creation of the defect may be included and any necessary preparation for repair or the debridement and repair of complicated lacerations of avulsions.
8. Debridement or decontamination of a wound is coded separately only when a wound requires prolonged cleansing, when appreciable amounts of devitalized tissue are removed, or when debridement is a separate procedure without immediate primary closure. In these instances, codes from the 11040-11044 range are assigned. There should be supporting documentation by the physician that will justify the use of the debridement code.
9. When a wound repair requires that blood vessels, tendons, or nerves be repaired, such repairs are reported under the appropriate system (cardiovascular, musculoskeletal, nervous ) and the skin repair is not coded.

10. The simple ligation of vessels in an open wound and the simple exploration of exposed nerves, blood vessels or tendons in an open wound are considered part of the repair of the wound and are not separate procedures.
11. Do not use complex repair codes for 1cm less than or any repairs other than eyelids, nose, ears, and/or lips. Use simple/intermediate repairs.
12. All wounds repaired in the same classification-simple, intermediate or complex-should be measured and documented in centimeters, whether curved, angular or stellate. (Example: The patient has an open wounds of the forehead, 1.5cm, of the chin, 1.0 cm, and of the nose, 0.5cm. The wounds were repaired in a simple closure. Assign CPT code 12013 for the repair of the wounds, as it equals 3.0 cm.
13. The principal procedure is the more complicated type of repair when more than one classification of wounds is repaired.
14. For full-thickness repair of lip or eyelid, see the appropriate anatomical section of the CPT book.

#### **I. Integumentary System - Skin Grafts**

1. Free skin grafts should be identified by the size and location of the defect (recipient area) and the type of graft. Use codes in this section as additional codes when closures from other subsections require skin grafts. Free skin grafts include: pinch grafts, split-thickness grafts and full-thickness grafts.
2. Flaps (skin and/or deep tissues) refer to recipient area when flap is being attached to final site.
3. Skin grafts are identified by the size and location of the defect and the type of graft (free, pedicle, flap or other). Skin graft codes may be used for both primary and secondary procedures.
4. Included in the subsection “Adjacent Tissue Transfer or Rearrangement” are the following types of repairs using skin flaps: Z-plasty, W-plasty, rotation flap, advancement flap, and double pedicle flap.
5. In a pedicle flap procedure, a flap of skin is lifted from a healthy site on the patient’s body. A portion of the skin is immediately grafted to the new site. The rest of the flap can be grafted to the new site once sufficient blood flow has been established. Pedicle flap procedures are used in the repair of defects or reconstructive surgery. The following procedures are often performed in pedicle flap repair of reconstruction:
  - Selection of donor site
  - Major debridement or excisional preparation of recipient area
  - Creation of open or tube pedicle at donor site
  - Attachment of pedicle flap to recipient site
  - Repair of donor site (application of skin graft or local flaps is considered an additional separate procedure).

If a patient has a flap graft of this type with repair of the donor site, then two codes would be required – one for all of the procedures described above from range 14000-14350 as well as the repair of the donor site.

6. There are several types of other flaps and grafts:
  - **Muscle flap** is a layer of muscle that has been dissected and moved to a new site.
  - **Myocutaneous flap** is a muscle flap with overlying skin and connective tissue.
  - **Split thickness grafts** include the epidermis and part of the dermis.
  - **Full thickness grafts** includes the epidermis and the entire dermis.
  - **Pedicle flap grafts** are full thickness grafts that include not only the skin and subcutaneous tissue, but also subcutaneous blood vessels to ensure a continued blood supply to the graft.
  - **Free flap graft** is a full thickness skin graft that is dissected with its capillary bed intact but does not have its nerve supply, blood vessels, skin, muscle or other tissues (such as cartilage and bone).

- **Allograft/homograft** is a tissue graft from one person to another.
  - **Xenograft/heterograft** is a graft from an animal to a human (usually temporary and designed to protect the skin until the patient has skin Available for grafting (i.e.: burn patients covered with pig skin).
7. Assign as an additional code, a code for a free skin graft performed on the donor site if it is required to close the donor site. If extensive repair or excision is performed prior to the free skin graft, then that procedure should be listed first and the skin graft should be listed next.
  8. Assign code 15000 for the excisional preparation of receiving and the appropriate skin graft code (15050-15400) when a lesion is excised and closed with a skin graft. Code 15000 is linked with a skin graft code, and not used by itself. Do not use the excision of skin lesion ranges (11400-11446, 11600-11646) when a skin graft is performed. A skin graft is not a simple closure. No code is assigned to the donor site unless skin grafting or local flaps are required to close the donor site.

**J. Integumentary System - Breast Lesions**

1. When a lesion is removed from a previous mastectomy site, the site is considered the “trunk”, not “breast”, since the breast is no longer present.
2. In an excisional breast biopsy, the entire lesion – whether benign or malignant – is removed; assign the code for an excisional breast biopsy if the physician attempts to perform an incisional biopsy on a very small lesion and the pathological review finds that the entire lesion and all of the margins are free of tumor (the entire lesion was removed intact). Use code 19120.
3. If an incisional breast biopsy, the entire lesion is not removed. Only a portion of the lesion is removed and sent to pathology, assign CPT code 19101.
4. Code 19290 should be used in addition to code 19120 when the breast lesion has been identified by the preoperative placement of radiological wire needle localization. Code 19291 is used for each additional lesion identified by preoperative placement of a needle.
5. Partial mastectomy involves the partial removal of part of the breast tissue, leaving the breast nearly intact (also called a “lobectomy”). Simple complete mastectomy involves the removal of all of the breast tissue (without removing lymph nodes or muscle). Subcutaneous mastectomy involves the removal of breast tissue, leaving the skin of the breast and the nipple intact. This type of mastectomy usually requires that a breast implant be inserted.
6. Code 19140 should be used for any mastectomy done for gynecomastia.

**K. Integumentary System - Miscellaneous**

The following table can be used in determining lesion size for code assignment purposes;

<u>Millimeters/Inches</u>	=	<u>Centimeters/Sq. Centimeters</u>
1 mm		0.1 cm
10 mm		1 cm
0.3837 in.		1cm
1 in.		2.54 cm (approx.)
0.16 sq. in.		1 sq. cm
1 sq. in.		6.452 sq. cm

**L. Male Genital System**

1. The coder should determine the type of prostatic biopsy that is performed in order to determine the correct CPT code assignment. CPT assign 55700 for a needle or punch biopsy via any approach. If the biopsy is incisional, via any approach, assign 55705.
2. Laser prostatectomy can be performed utilizing a Variety of devices and operative techniques. Depending upon how it is performed and in some instances why will determine the CPT code that will be assigned. The coder should review the operative report carefully to determine the appropriate CPT code assignment.
  - **Transurethral laser-induced Prostatectomy (TULIP)** – This procedure uses a narrow free-beam or noncontact laterally deflecting laser device to perform a prostatectomy. Assign 52648 for this procedure.
  - **Transurethral electro-surgical resection of the prostate** – In this approach, the surgeon utilizes an electrocautery knife to resect the prostate. Assign 52601 for this approach.
  - **Non-contact laser prostatectomy** – This is performed utilizing a non-contact laser. The surgeon will specify in the operative report the utilization of this type of laser. When this is specified, assign 52647 for this procedure.
3. The surgeon may also perform prostatectomy utilizing a number of different methods. The other types a coder may identify are:
  - **Transurethral two stage prostatectomy** – The surgeon may perform a prostatectomy in two stages. The surgeon will specify in the medical record and/or operative report that this is the first or second stage of a prostate. Assign 52612 for the first stage and 52614 for the second stage.
  - **Transurethral destruction of the prostate using microwave therapy** – The surgeon used microwave thermotherapy for this procedure. Assign 53850 for this procedure.
  - **Transurethral destruction of the prostate using radiofrequency** – During this procedure, the physician uses radiofrequency thermotherapy to destroy the prostate. Assign 53852 for this procedure.
4. A surgeon may also perform a transurethral resection of residual tissue of the prostate. The surgeon will document in the medical record that the patient has residual tissue to be resected. The coder should determine when the initial prostatectomy was performed in order to assign the correct CPT code. Assign 52620 if the procedure is after 90 days postop. CPT code 52630 is assigned when the regrowth is greater than one year postop.
5. Although CPT code 55520 (excision of spermatic cord lipoma) is a separate procedure, if done with an inguinal hernia repair (49495-49525), neither procedure is considered an inherently inclusive component of the other. Therefore, an inguinal hernia repair code may be reported in addition to the excision of spermatic cord lipoma (55520).

**M. Musculoskeletal System - Fracture-Dislocation**

1. Codes exist for an “open” versus a “closed” fracture and “open” versus a “closed” treatment of that fracture. Open treatment is used when the fracture is surgically exposed to the external environment. The fracture is visualized and internal fixation may be used. Closed treatment specifically means that the fracture site is not surgically opened.
2. Codes for the treatment of fractures includes the application and removal of the initial cast and/or traction device only. Do not code the initial cast separately. Subsequent replacement of the cast/traction device requires a code from 29000 to 29799. Effective in 1996, the cast/splint application may be utilized by a physician not expected to deliver further care to the patient, as in the ER.
3. Reduction of a fracture is used commonly in the medical community, yet the term “reduction” is not found often in the CPT classification system. Instead the term “manipulation” is used.

4. Exercise caution in coding fractures, especially when differentiating between the type of fracture and the type of treatment. A closed fracture may require either closed and/or open treatment, whereas an open fracture requires open treatment. Be sure to identify:
  - The site of the fracture.
  - Whether the fracture was open or closed.
  - Whether treatment was open or closed.
  - If the manipulation was part of the treatment.
  - If the procedure included soft tissue closure.
  - Whether the procedure included internal or external skeletal fixation of the fracture.
5. Exercise caution in coding dislocations, especially in differentiating between the types of dislocation and the types of treatment. Closed dislocations may require either closed and/or open treatment, whereas open dislocations require open treatment. Make certain to identify:
  - The site of the dislocation.
  - Whether the dislocation was open or closed.
  - If the treatment was open or closed.
  - Whether manipulation was part of the treatment.
  - Whether the procedure included soft tissue closures.
  - If the procedure included internal and external skeletal fixation of the dislocation.
6. If a cast is placed but no procedure is performed, the coder would report the appropriate E&M code, codes for the application of casts and strapping plus any supplies provided.

**N. Musculoskeletal - Bone Grafts and Biopsies**

1. Codes for obtaining autogenous (from the patient) bone, cartilage, tendon, fascia or other tissue grafts through separate incision are to be assigned only when graft is not listed as part of basic procedure. Therefore, a separate graft code would not be necessary if reconstruction and the graft repair were performed at the same time by the same surgeon.
2. For biopsy of soft tissue, choose the code according to site and to whether the biopsy is superficial or deep.
3. For needle or trocar bone biopsies, choose code 20220 or 20225, depending on site.
4. For needle or trocar bone marrow biopsy, use code 38220; and 38221 for bone marrow aspiration only. Reference: CPT Changes 2002

**O. Musculoskeletal System - Miscellaneous**

1. The term “complicated” is also used in the description of some musculoskeletal codes. (See 28193). This term implies that an infection occurred, or treatment was delayed or extensive surgery was performed requiring over and above the usual time for the procedure.
2. The diagnostic arthroscopy procedure code (29870-separate procedure) is not coded when a code in range 29871-29887 is used.
3. Do not code the wire insertion separately. Insertion of a wire with application of skeletal traction is part of the bunionectomy procedure.
4. For injection procedures of the spine for myelography, discography, chemonucleolysis, and facet joints, use the correct code for the injection from the Nervous System subsection.

5. When the narrative description states “each tendon” or “each muscle” the code should be repeated as often as necessary. Higher reimbursement depends on the repetition.
6. Primary tendon (first time repair) repairs are grouped higher than secondary repairs (repairs subsequent to primary repairs).

**P. Musculoskeletal System - Arthroscopies**

When arthroscopy is performed in conjunction with arthrotomy, each procedure may be reported separately. The physician must clearly document all of the information necessary to correctly code these surgical procedures.

**Q. Nervous System**

1. Assign 64721 for the open release of carpal tunnel; assign 29848 if the procedure is performed arthroscopically.
2. When coding epidural injections, the coder needs to determine the site of the injection and the agents being injected. When both an anesthetic and steroid are injected, assign the code that states “anesthetic substance (including narcotics)”.
3. Types of injections that a coder may find when coding are:
  - Single injection involves one injection of a substance(s)
  - Differential injection involves the segmented injection of a substance(s) at fixed time intervals (e.g., 1 cc Xylocaine every 10 minutes)
  - Continuous injection involves infusion of a substance(s) over a continuous period of time (e.g., IV drip)
4. The physician may also insert a subarachnoid or epidural catheter for continuous drug infusion. Assign 62318 for continuous injection of drugs in the cervical or thoracic regional or 62319 for the lumbar, sacral (caudal). If connected to either an external pump, an implantable reservoir, or an implantable infusion pump, use either 62351 or 62350, with or without laminectomy.
5. A facet joint injection involves the injection of a steroid and an anesthetic agent into the facet joints of the vertebrae to alleviate chronic low back pain. Assign 64475 for a single level, lumbar and 64476 for each additional level of the lumbar area.
6. Excision of Morton’s neuroma will not be found in this subsection. The correct CPT code for this procedure is found in the musculoskeletal subsection. The correct assignment is 28080.

**R. Ophthalmologic System - Cataracts**

1. Do not use code 65130 for insertion of intraocular lens (IOL) after cataract removal; the code pertains to the secondary implant of an eyeball and not a lens. The correct code is 66985.
2. Definitions:
  - Intracapsular extraction – Surgical removal of the entire lens and its capsule.
  - Extracapsular extraction – Surgical removal of the front portion and nucleus of the lens, leaving the posterior capsule in place.
  - Anterior chamber intraocular lens – Inserted after intracapsular cataract extraction.
  - Posterior chamber intraocular lens – Generally inserted after extracapsular cataract extraction.
3. There is a note that lists the procedures that are included as part of the extraction of lens codes (66830-66985). This code range includes the following procedures:
  - Lateral canthotomy

- Iridectomy
  - Iridotomy
  - Anterior capsulotomy
  - Posterior capsulotomy
  - Subconjunctival or sub-tendon injections
4. Also included are the use of other pharmacological agents, such as:
- Viscoelastic agents – a liquid injected into the connective tissue collagen in order to maintain the shape of the anterior segment of the eye while the procedure is being performed.
  - Enzymatic zonulysis – the method used to break up adhesions or areas of fibrosis in the anterior chamber.
5. The most common cataract surgery is the phacoemulsification of the cataract with immediate lens implant. This is associated with the extracapsular extraction of the lens. When the physician performs this type of procedure, the coder will assign 66984.
6. Vitrectomy is the aspiration of the vitreous and replacement with a saline solution or vitreous to clear an opaque vitreous. Coders commonly overlook this procedure as an additional code when done with a cataract extraction. However, one must note that a vitrectomy can only be coded if a vitreous chamber tap is done. Some of the vitrectomies done with cataracts include:
- 67015 – aspiration/release of vitreous pars plana approach
  - 67030 – discussion of vitreous strands pars plana approach (rarely performed)
  - 67031 – laser vitrectomy (non –invasive)
- Common terms associated with vitrectomy:
- Paracentesis – insertion of knife/needle to remove vitreous
  - Air injection – air is used to replace the vitreous
  - Mechanical vitrectomy – an outcome or Microvax is used to cut and suction the vitreous instead of hand-held sponges and scissors.
  - Pars plana approach – the vitreous is released via an incision behind the iris (also called a posterior sclerotomy).
7. Stages of laser surgery:
- Initial stage – first episode to cut vitreous strands
  - Additional stages to remove debris

**S. Ophthalmologic System - Strabismus Surgery**

1. CPT strabismus surgery codes apply to procedures performed on one eye only. Therefore, each code under this heading is a unilateral code.
2. When multiple procedures are performed on one eye, the secondary procedures are reported with the –51 (multiple procedures) modifier unless the secondary procedures are “add-on” codes. The –51 modifier is never reported with “add-on” codes.
3. Before selecting a code for strabismus surgery, always identify the following key facts.
  - a) Determine whether surgery was performed on one or both eyes.
  - b) If performed on both eyes, determine whether any of the procedures were bilateral. This means that if a given procedure is performed on both eyes, then the procedure is bilateral. For example, when a horizontal muscle is operated on for the first time in the right and left eyes, code 67311 is used to report the fact that surgery was performed on horizontal muscles in each eye. It is reported twice or used with modifier 09950 (-50). The theory is that two incisions were made, one in each eye area.

On the other hand, if a vertical muscle in the left eye is operated on for the first time and a horizontal muscle is corrected in the right eye for the first time, the procedures are not bilateral because a different code is used to report each procedure. In this case, codes 67314 and 67311 are reported.

- c) When the patient has not had previous eye surgery, select the appropriate primary strabismus surgery code(s) from code range 67311-67318 to report the procedure(s) performed.
- d) Identify which muscles have been operated on in each eye and then determine whether the operated muscles are horizontal, vertical, or oblique muscles. You will need this information to select the primary strabismus surgery code for each procedure performed.
- e) Check the clinical history to learn whether the patient has had previous eye surgery or injury that did not involve the extraocular muscles. If that is the case, report code:

67331 Strabismus surgery on patient with previous eye surgery or injury that did not involve the extraocular muscles.

Use in addition to the code for the primary strabismus surgery. Because this code is an add-on code, do not add the --1 (multiple procedures) modifier when reporting it.

If the patient has had previous eye surgery or injury that did involve the extraocular muscles, see code 67332.

- f) Codes 67320, 67331, 67332, 67335 and 67340 are add-on codes in this subsection. This means that, when applicable, one or more of them are listed in addition to the basic strabismus procedure code to explain other important conditions related to the case and to indicate that additional payment is warranted for the additional work and risk involved in the procedure. Add-on codes are never reported with the --1 modifier. They may, however, be reported with the -50 modifier, as appropriate.

#### **T. Ophthalmologic System -Miscellaneous**

1. Codes for procedures involving only skin of the eyelid or orbit are found in the Integumentary system.
2. Retinal detachment codes require clear documentation of methodology and specify combination codes where appropriate. For example, if scleral buckling is performed with cryotherapy and photocoagulation, only code 67107 is needed to report all three procedures.
3. CPT differentiates between a foreign body removal and removal of implanted material in the eye. The codes 65205-65265 are for the removal of a foreign body. The codes for removal of implanted material are 65175 (ocular implant), 65920 (anterior segment implant), 67120 (posterior segment implant) and 67560 (orbital implant).
4. Repair of lacerations of the eyeball includes use of conjunctiva flap and restoration of anterior chamber, by air or saline injection when indicated.
5. An anterior vitrectomy involves removal of vitreous from in front of the iris. The pars plana vitrectomy involves an approach behind the iris.
6. If a vitrectomy is performed during a cataract extraction, it is considered to be therapeutic for treatment of a complication and is coded separately. The appropriate ICD-9-CM complication code should also be listed.
7. Keratoplasty excludes refractive keratoplasty procedures, 65760, 65765, and 65767.

8. Corneal transplant includes the use of fresh or preserved grafts, and preparation of donor material.

**U. Respiratory System -Sinus Surgeries**

1. Nasal antrostomies are also called antrotomies. An antrostomy is formation of an opening made in any antrum. An antrotomy is technically an incision into the antrum. The reason for the antrostomy is the key in coding these procedures. If an incision is made in the maxillary antrum for the purpose of removing maxillary sinus polyps only, then CPT code 21327 would be used only.
2. You must know the difference between open and endoscopic surgery approaches. Open surgical nasal procedures are generally performed by making an incision into the skin or tissues inside a body opening, such as the mouth and nose. Endoscopy procedures utilize the endoscope inserted through the nostrils. Endoscopy codes 31231-31294 are for UNILATERAL procedural only. If a bilateral procedure is performed, the code must be reported twice, or modifier (-50) must be used. Surgical endoscopy codes always include the diagnostic endoscopy, so this should not be reported separately.
3. A Caldwell-Luc operation is a maxillary sinusotomy, technically. The physician creates an opening into the maxillary sinus through the oral cavity. This is to allow drainage of the sinus for treatment of irreversible maxillary sinusitis. An intraoral incision is made in the labial mucosa, exposing the canine fossa. This is perforated with a trocar and biting forceps to increase the opening into the maxillary sinus. Sinus mucosa is removed with curettes. A second opening is made from the nasal cavity into the inferior meatus, a trocar is used to perforate an opening into the inferior meatus. It is enlarged with biting forceps. Use code 31030 for the Caldwell-Luc operation. Use code 31032 for the Caldwell-Luc operation when antrochoanal polyps are removed. The typical ICD-9-CM procedure code assigned with these codes is 22.31. 22.61 is used with 31032. CPT code 30920, 31000, 31020, and 31090 should **not** appear with codes 31030 or 31032.
4. Codes 30801 and 30802 are for cauterization of turbinates. Since this is a separate procedure, if this procedure is done with another nasal procedure though the same incision, such as a Caldwell-Luc procedure without polyp removal, then **only** code 31030 is reported. Separate procedures performed at the same time through the same incision are not coded separately.
5. Code 30930 is for fracture or outfracture of turbinate(s). More than one can be fractured.
6. Code 30130, excision turbinate, partial or complete, can be coded in addition to other nasal procedure codes if documented by the physician. 30130 is considered a unilateral procedure.
7. Unless specified otherwise, all pharynx, adenoids and tonsil codes are bilateral.

**V. Respiratory System - Miscellaneous**

1. If a transbronchial lung biopsy was done and no tissue is reported on the pathology report, the surgeon has still performed a transbronchial lung biopsy and the appropriate code is assigned (31628).
2. Many times a surgeon will perform a laryngoscopy for purposes of determining a diagnosis in this area of the respiratory system. CPT separates the types of laryngoscopy by direct, indirect, with or without operating microscope and if a fiberoptic scope was used for the procedure. The coder should thoroughly review the operative report to find out what was done and therefore, the correct code assignment as a result of the documentation.
  - **Indirect laryngoscopy** is when the larynx is seen with the use of mirrors placed within the throat and oral cavity. The physician will indicate in the operative report “indirect” or use of mirrors in order to identify this type of laryngoscopy.

- **Direct laryngoscopy** is when a laryngoscope is used to view the larynx directly through the scope.
- **Operating microscope** is clearly identified in the operative report by the surgeon when it is utilized. The coder should never assume that an operating microscope was used.

**W. Urinary System**

1. Urodynamic procedures should be coded in addition to cystoscopies. These procedures may be performed separately or in combination.
2. "Exclusive or radiologic service" indicates that an additional code from the radiology section of CPT must be assigned in order to classify the radiological service performed.
3. The urinary subsection also separates endoscopy procedures from open procedures. Surgical endoscopy procedures include a diagnostic endoscopy. The coder will assign a diagnostic endoscopy only when no surgical procedure has been performed.
4. The transurethral prostate procedures are listed in the urinary section. Open prostate procedures are listed in the male genital system.
5. A meatotomy is performed to treat a meatal stricture, which is a narrowing of the urethra. This usually occurs in the male. A meatotomy involves taking a pair of scissors and cutting the meatus wider to make it larger. A meatotomy can be ventral, transverse or dorsal.
6. Impotence is defined as male erectile dysfunction. The two main categories of dysfunction are psychologic (302.72) and organic (607.84) with a "mixture" of factors often being present. Organic causes may be vascular, neurologic, hormonal, medical or drug-related. When a physical (organic) disorder partially accounts for the psychological factors contributing to erectile dysfunction, both diagnoses should be coded. Unspecified impotence is assumed to be psychogenic in nature per the ICD-9-CM code book. Due to our patient population, most patients fall under "organic" impotence. If impotence is unspecified, it is highly suggested a query be made to the treating physician before affixing the psychologic (302.72) code for impotence. Impotence resulting from a radical prostatectomy is coded to 997.99.

**X. Urinary System - Ureter**

1. Indwelling ureteral catheters are inserted into the renal pelvis via the ureter to allow drainage when something, such as a tumor, is impinging on the ureters. Gibbons and double-J stents are the most common ureteral stents. The insertion of a temporary stent (52332) is included in code 52330 when performed and will not be reported separately. A permanent stent should be coded as 52332-51 in addition to the primary procedure.
2. The CPT code for insertion of the ureteral stent (52332) is used to report a unilateral procedure unless otherwise specified.
3. To report cystourethroscopic removal of a self-retaining, indwelling ureteral stent, assign 52310 for simple removal or 52315 for complicated removal.

**Y. Urinary System - Cystoscopy, Urethroscopy and Cystourethroscopy**

1. Cystoscopy (cystourethroscopy) allows direct visual examination of the bladder and urethra. Assign CPT code 52000 when a diagnostic cystourethroscopy is performed.

2. Many times the surgeon will perform a retrograde pyelography (retrograde ureteropyelography). In this procedure, one or both of the ureters are catheterized during a cystoscopic examination, and a contrast medium is injected slowly through the catheter. X-ray films are then taken. Assign 52005 for this procedure.
3. The surgeon may perform an intravenous pyelogram (excretory urography). This pyelogram involves the intravenous injection of dye/contrast medium at designated intervals; x-rays are taken to observe the rate of excretion. Ureteral catheterization is not performed during this procedure and it usually precedes the cystoscopy. Assign 52000 for this procedure.

**Z. Urinary System - Transurethral Surgery (Urethra and Bladder)**

1. Review the record for a history of a previous transurethral resection of the prostate (TURP) in order to correctly code a repeat TURP. If residual tissue of the prostate is resected, the coder needs to determine if the initial prostatectomy was performed within 90 days post-operatively or if the regrowth is greater than one-year separately.
2. Transurethral surgeries will include the diagnostic cystoscopy. Do not code the cystoscopy separately.
3. If the surgeon performs a urethral dilation to determine the size (French) of the cystoscope to be inserted, the coder will not code the dilation separately. It will be included in any additional procedures that are performed during the operative episode.
4. If the surgeon performs a cystoscopy and then performs a transurethral dilatation for a urethral stricture, the coder will assign 52281.
5. For cystoscopy, with removal of foreign body, calculus or ureteral stent from urethra or bladder, assign 52310 for simple removal or 52315 for complicated removal.

**AA. Urinary System - Lithotripsy**

1. Percutaneous lithotomy (lithotripsy) is a two stage procedure first requiring a percutaneous nephrostomy with dilation of the nephrostomy tract. Instruments such as a basket or lithotripter can then be inserted via the nephrostomy and stones are removed. Assign 50081 or 50082 depending upon the size of the stone that is removed.
2. Extracorporeal shock wave lithotripsy (EWSL) is a non-operative procedure utilizing ultrasound shock waves to aid in breaking up the stone(s) in the renal pelvis and/or ureter. The patient is then able to pass the stones with minimal discomfort. Assign 50590 for this procedure.
3. A surgeon may perform a transurethral ureteroscopic lithotripsy in lieu of an EWSL. In this procedure, a cystoscope is inserted through the urethra into the bladder. Catheters are passed through the scope into the opening where the ureters enter the bladder. Instruments are then passed into the ureters and manipulation and disintegration of the stones occur utilizing a transcystoscopic electrohydraulic shock waves, ultrasound or laser. Assign 52337 for this procedure. CPT code 52325 would be assigned if a ureteroscopy were not performed.

**BB. Urinary System - Urodynamics**

1. CPT has a section for urodynamics. The code range is 51725-51797. The procedure in this section may be performed separately or in combination. The coder will not find "separate procedure" in this section and therefore, may assign as many codes as needed for the procedure that is performed during the operative episode.

2. The types of procedures found in this section are:
  - Simple cystometrogram – measurement of the bladder’s capacity, sensation of filling and intravesical pressure
  - Complex cystometrogram – same as simple cystometrogram. In a complex procedure the physician utilizes a rectal probe to differentiate between abdominal pressure from bladder pressure.
  - Simple uroflowmetry – measures the time of voiding and the peak flow.
  - Complex uroflowmetry – measures and records the mean and peak flow and the time taken to reach peak flow during continuous urination.
  - Urethral pressure profile (UPP) – records pressures along the urethra as a special catheter is slowly withdrawn
  - Electromyography studies of the anal or urethral sphincter – this records the muscle activity during voiding and gives a simultaneous recording of urine flow rate.