

Dermatology Coding Alert

Reader Question: Malignancy Leads Code Choice

Question: Sometimes our surgeon excises in situ basal cell carcinoma, but sometimes he uses "destruction" methods such as liquid nitrogen for small lesions. How should I code these?

Texas Subscriber

Answer: Because basal cell carcinoma is a malignancy, you need to choose the excision or destruction codes accordingly.

Excision: For lesion excision, choose a code such as 11603 (Excision, malignant lesion including margins, trunk, arms, or legs; excised diameter 2.1 to 3.0 cm). CPT® provides 18 codes in the range 11600-11646 to choose from, depending on the malignant lesion site and size. You should not use a code from the range 11400-11446 (Excision, benign lesion including margins, except skin tag ...), which describe benign lesion excisions.

Destruction: For destruction, choose a code from the range 17260-17286 (Destruction malignant lesion ...). Avoid codes in the range 17000-17004 (Destruction ... premalignant lesions...), because those are for benign lesions.