

Dermatology Coding Alert

Reader Questions: Include Chart Review in E/M

Question: A patient had her past medical records, containing more than 10 years of history, sent to our dermatologist for review. Not all of the history related to her current condition. How can I charge for the doctor's time reviewing these records?

Nebraska Subscriber

Answer: CPT considers reviewing records as an integral part of the E/M service, and you should not bill for it separately.

Although CPT does not include the time associated with records review in the time component described in the E/M codes, "the pre- and post-face-to-face work associated with an encounter was included in calculating the total work of typical services in physician surveys." Consequently, the service described by the E/M codes "is a valid proxy for the total work done before, during, and after the visit," CPT states.

On the other hand, if your dermatologist reviews the records and writes a summary of those records, you may be able to raise the level of medical decision-making. This would, in turn, allow you to choose a higher-level E/M service if you combine the E/M service with the history and examination.

Medicare gives two points for summarizing medical history. For instance, if your dermatologist also orders and reviews a lab result, then the data category for medical decision-making increases to multiple. If risk to the patient is moderate, you should report moderate-complexity medical decision-making.

When combined with a detailed history and examination, you have a level-three new patient service (99203, Office or other outpatient visit for the evaluation and management of a new patient ...) or a level-four established patient service (99214, Office or other outpatient visit for the evaluation and management of an established patient ...).