

Internal Medicine Coding Alert

Asthma Attack: Does Prolonged or High-Level E/M Represent Your Work?

This checklist deters payback requests for insufficient +99354 time.

After spending almost an hour stabilizing an acute asthmatic, an extra \$60 can be in store provided you make the right choice between coding prolonged services or a higher-level E/M.

Case study: A patient requires two nebulizer treatments and lengthy treatment time due to hay fever with exacerbated asthma (493.02, Extrinsic asthma; with [acute] exacerbation). Which of the following E/M options would you report:

a. 99214 -- Office or other outpatient visit for the evaluation and management of an established patient, which requires at least 2 of these 3 key components: a detailed history; a detailed examination; medical decision making of moderate complexity & Usually, the presenting problems are of moderate to high severity. Physicians typically spend 25 minutes face-to-face with the patient and/or family.

and +99354 -- Prolonged physician service in the office or other outpatient setting requires direct (face-to-face) patient contact beyond the usual service; first hour (List separately in addition to code for office or other outpatient Evaluation and Management service)

b. 99215 -- Office or other outpatient visit for the evaluation and management of an established patient, which requires at least 2 of these 3 key components: a comprehensive history; a comprehensive examination; medical decision making of high complexity & Usually, the presenting problems are of moderate to high severity. Physicians typically spend 40 minutes face-to-face with the patient and/or family.

Check Typical 493.02 HEM

This encounter will most likely qualify for a level four established patient office visit (99214) with prolonged services (+99354), rather than a level-five office visit (99215), says **Donelle Holle, RN**, in Fort Wayne, Ind. The 99214 visit includes 25 minutes of face-to-face time, with the additional 35 minutes meeting the greater than 30 minute requirement for billing +99354.

You probably won't have enough history, evaluation, and medical decision making (MDM) to justify 99215. Asthmatic attacks usually involve a detailed history, not much exam, and high complexity medical decision making, Holle says. These key components would not support 99215 as this chart shows:



The other way to reach 99215 is for counseling to comprise more than 50 percent of the physician-patient face-to-face encounter, Holle adds. Counseling does not typically dominate acute asthmatic attack encounters.

Tally Time Following 4 Rules

A University of Utah coder has been receiving payback requests for prolonged services due to not meeting the services time threshold. The physicians had reported 99354s with 99214s based on performed and documented key components. Before coding the prolonged service, make sure you count time using these guidelines:

" Count only minutes beyond the typical time that CPT designates for that E/M service. For a 99214 that meets the three components, you would back out 25 minutes before adding on prolonged services, explains **Peter Hollmann, MD**, medical director for Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Rhode Island.

" In the outpatient setting, you can count only face-to-face time the physician spends directly with the patient. To support 99354 with 99214, the physician would have to spend at least 30 minutes beyond 99214s typical time of 25

minutes -- or at least 55 minutes  " directly with the patient in E/M services.

" Do not include time performing procedures toward the prolonged services time. In an asthmatic attack encounter, you would exclude minutes spent performing nebulizer treatment (94640, Pressurized or nonpressurized inhalation treatment for acute airway obstruction or for sputum induction for diagnostic purposes [e.g., with an aerosol generator, nebulizer, metered dose inhaler or intermittent positive pressure breathing [IPPB] device]) and pulse oximetry (such as 94761, Noninvasive ear or pulse oximetry for oxygen saturation; multiple determinations [e.g., during exercise]) from qualifying for +99354 time.

" Time can be non-continuous. For instance, evaluation and management before and after a nebulizer treatment (94640) can count toward prolonged services (+99354).

