

Internal Medicine Coding Alert

BP Spike, Pregnancy-Related Hypertension Get Different Treatment

When a patient who has not been diagnosed with hypertension has an elevated blood pressure reading, don't use a code from the 401-405 series, because that can unfairly label the patient with a hypertension diagnosis.

If the patient has not had high readings previously but exhibits a blood pressure above the normal range during an office visit check, "I would call that 'elevated blood pressure' (796.2, Elevated blood pressure reading without diagnosis of hypertension)," says **Greg Pennock, MD**, a cardiologist at the Heart Center of Southern Arizona in Tucson.

This is the type of patient who may be referred for ambulatory blood pressure monitoring (ABPM), says **Sherry Straub, RHIT, CCS, CCS-P**, coding and compliance manager at Esse Health, a multispecialty practice in St. Louis.

"The patient may just be nervous," Straub says. "He may have white-coat hypertension." (See story on ABPM, article 2).

And you should not use the 401-405 codes for a pregnant patient with hypertension. Instead, you should use the 642 series (Hypertension complicating pregnancy, childbirth and the puerperium) in those cases.