

## Internal Medicine Coding Alert

### Condition of the Month: Are You At Risk for Using Incorrect CVA Diagnosis Codes?

#### Why the rules change when you report a stroke's 'late effects'

Heads up, coders: When you report the "late effects" of cerebrovascular accident (CVA) or stroke, all you need is one code to describe the condition's cause and effect.

#### Why CVA Is an Exception to the Rules

Many internal medicine coders incorrectly assume that if a patient has late effects of CVA, they should follow traditional late-effects coding rules and use two codes to report the cause of the condition along with the residual effect.

**Right way:** Remember that reporting a stroke's late effects deviates from this coding rule, because all you need is one primary diagnosis code. You should choose the appropriate code in a separate section (438.x) of the ICD-9 manual. These codes, such as 438.11 (Late effects of cerebrovascular disease; aphasia) or 438.21 (... hemiplegia affecting dominant side), describe both the cause and the effect.

**For example:** A 78-year-old patient who had CVA in 2002 develops residual hemiplegia that affects his nondominant side. So, you would assign 438.22 (... hemiplegia affecting nondominant side), says **Bruce Rappoport, MD, CPC**, a board-certified internist who works with physicians on compliance, documentation, coding and quality issues for Rachlin, Cohen & Holtz LLP, a Fort Lauderdale, Fla.-based accounting firm with healthcare expertise. The residual deficit defines which ICD-9 code is most appropriate, he says.

#### Report New CVA Cases First

Be careful that you don't report a code from the 438.x series for all CVA diagnoses. If a patient has another CVA, you should report the new condition first, followed by the appropriate late-effects code.

**Why:** You should report the new and previous CVA this way to identify current CVA complications, while describing pre-existing conditions as well, coding experts say.

For example, the physician admits a patient with acute cerebral thrombosis. The patient previously had a stroke, which left her with impaired speech. Code the current condition first, using 434.0x (Cerebral thrombosis), and add 438.12 (... dysphasia) as a secondary diagnosis. If the patient has no residual problems from the first CVA, you may report V12.59 (Personal history of certain other diseases of circulatory system; other) as the secondary diagnosis, according to ICD-9 guidelines.