

Internal Medicine Coding Alert

Reader question: Code Malignant Facial Lesion With 173.3

Question: The physician removed a lesion from the patient's temple area. The pathology report stated the benign mole sample contained basal cell carcinoma. Which diagnosis code do we assign as primary, and which as secondary?

Utah Subscriber

Answer: Assign 173.3 (Other malignant neoplasm of skin; skin of other and unspecified parts of face) because the report refers to the primary site of cancer. If the cancer had metastasized from another cancerous site or if treatment was focusing on a secondary site, 198.2 (Secondary malignant neoplasm of skin) would be more fitting.