

Internal Medicine Coding Alert

Reader Question: Different Doctor Removes Stitches

Question: One physician in our group practice puts in stitches. When the patient returns to the group to get stitches removed, a different physician in the same group removes them. Can I bill for suture removal in this situation?

Connecticut Subscriber

Answer: No, you cannot charge separately for suture removal because the physician removing stitches is a member of the same group. CPT generally includes the work involved in the removal in the reimbursement for suturing.

One exception to this is when the physician must remove the stitches under anesthesia, a situation that is unlikely to occur in the office. Use CPT codes 15850 (Removal of sutures under anesthesia [other than local], same surgeon) or 15851 (Removal of sutures under anesthesia [other than local], other surgeon) for this situation.

If another provider (for example, an emergency department physician) puts in the sutures and then the patient comes to her internist (who is not in the same group as the emergency physician) for stitch removal, you could use the low-level E/M code 99211 for the suture removal if that was the only E/M service provided during the visit.