

Internal Medicine Coding Alert

Reader Question: Payment for Diabetes Education

Question: Our physician and physician assistant are educating some patients on diabetes, exercise, and nutrition at our practice twice a month. The plan is to bring the patients in at 4:45 to workup the patient, and start the group session at 5 p.m. for about 45 minutes to an hour. Can practices report these services? Will carriers pay for them?

Michigan Subscriber

Answer: You have a few options depending on what insurers cover.

Option 1: For the workup, report the appropriate level E/M service, such as 99212 (Office or other outpatient visit for the evaluation and management of an established patient ...). Use physician group education codes for the 45-minute counseling session.

Since the education is in a group setting provided by a physician or non-physician practitioner (the physician assistant [PA]) and the patients have an established illness (diabetes), the sessions fall under 99078 (Physician educational services rendered to patients in a group setting [e.g., prenatal, obesity, or diabetic instructions]).

This code is not time-based and can be coded per patient. You can report the office visit appended with modifier 25 (Significant, separately identifiable evaluation and management service by the same physician on the same day of the procedure or other service) in addition to the physician educational services.

Pitfall: Because the Medicare Physician Fee Schedule considers 99078 a bundled service and assigns it no relative value units (RVUs), Medicaid carriers and private payers may not pay for the educational services code.

Option 2: You might want to provide the American Diabetes Association's National Standards curriculum, which aims to reduce exacerbations and improve diabetes symptoms through exercise, nutrition, personal goals, and lifestyle habits. Physicians are eligible for providing this service, and PAs can bill it incident-to the physician. Under this option, you would use a code of G0109 (Diabetes outpatient self-management training services, group session [2 or more], per 30 minutes), instead of 99078. Medicare and some Medicaid programs cover this service; some private payer may also cover it.

The corresponding individual code is G0108 (Diabetes outpatient self-management training services, individual, per 30 minutes).

As with Option 1, above, you may report the work-up with an appropriate E/M code. Be sure to append modifier 25 to the E/M code to indicate that the workup was significant and separately identifiable from the diabetes self-management training.