

Internal Medicine Coding Alert

Reader Questions: Hang Up on 99371 Reimbursement

Question: Will insurance companies reimburse telephone codes 99371-99373? Our internist provides a lot of "free care" over the phone but would like to start charging for this.

New Jersey Subscriber

Answer: If your internist spends too much time talking with patients on the phone, you may have a time-management issue. Instead of discussing medications and treatment options on the phone, he should make the patient schedule an office visit. You are, however, limited in how to bill these conversations.

Why: Medicare payers won't reimburse for 99371-99373. Most private payers follow Medicare's lead, so they don't accept these codes either.

Possible solution: Tell the physician to document the amount of time he spends on the phone calls in the E/M level. For example, if the physician sees a patient in the morning, and the patient calls in the afternoon to discuss the prescription, the doctor should document this conversation in the medical notes.