

Internal Medicine Coding Alert

Reader Questions: 2 Hospital Visits: 1 E/M Service or 2?

Question: A private payer representative informed my physicians that they can bill for more than one subsequent hospital visit per day. For a second visit on the same day to an already admitted patient, the doctor should report the subsequent care code with modifier 25 to indicate a separate service, according to the representative. I consider 99231-99233 "per day" codes and teach my physicians to report one code per day. I always thought that if a physician has to see a patient more than one time per day, he uses a higher-level code based on time and complexity or uses the prolonged codes, as appropriate. Could you explain how to code multiple visits on subsequent care days?

South Carolina Subscriber

Answer: Per CPT guidelines, you would use only one subsequent care code (99231-99233, Subsequent hospital care, per day, for the evaluation and management of a patient ...). You are right; these are "per day" codes, which include all the day's services. The physician would choose the appropriate level of subsequent care that reflects all the E/M services provided and documented by members of the same specialty group practice for that patient on the date of service.

Medicare explains this concept in Transmittal 1545, effective April 1, 2008: "Both initial inpatient hospital care codes and subsequent hospital care codes are 'per diem' services and may be reported only once per day by the same physician or physicians of the same specialty from the same group practice."

Although Medicare and CPT guidelines can vary, they are the same regarding two hospital visits on the same day. Before coding 9923x and 9923x-25 (Significant, separately identifiable evaluation and management service by the same physician on the same day of the procedure or other service) for the same day, first obtain written documentation from the insurer confirming its reimbursement policy for multiple hospital visits on the same day.

-- Answers to You Be the Coder and Reader Questions were reviewed by **Bruce Rappoport, MD, CPC, CHCC**, a board-certified internist and medical director of Broward Health's Best Choice Plus and Total Claims Administration in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.