

Internal Medicine Coding Alert

You Be the Coder: Mini-mental Exams

Question: What is the correct way to bill for a mini-mental status examination (MMSE)? A neurobehavioral status exam (96115) is billed in one-hour units, which is longer than we take for an MMSE, but it is the only code that seems appropriate.

Georgia Subscriber

Test your coding knowledge. Determine how you would code this situation before looking at the box below for the answer.

Answer: Carriers do not believe that the work involved or the time spent on an MMSE is sufficient to meet the requirements for billing 96115 (neurobehavioral status exam [clinical assessment of thinking, reasoning and judgment, e.g., acquired knowledge, attention, memory, visual spatial abilities, language functions, planning] with interpretation and report, per hour).

According to CPT Assistant, to bill for 96115 the physician must perform a clinical evaluation of memory, attention/concentration, motor speed and strength, speed of mental processing, language functions, visual-spatial abilities, planning and judgment, etc. The evaluation should also include hypothesis-testing Lurian methodology, expanded mental status Milestone Screen, with interpretation and interview, and selected items from formal psychological tests. The physician then interprets the findings, formulates a diagnostic impression and recommends treatment.

By comparison, a physician performing an MMSE, which is a quick way to evaluate cognitive function and screen for dementia or monitor its progression, does not do all of the work described above. Getting paid separately for a mini-mental status exam is one of the most common myths in coding folklore, says **Susan Callaway, CPC, CCS-P**, an independent coding consultant and educator based in North Augusta, S.C. A clue in the code definition for 96115 is that it should be reported per hour.

Therefore, brief mental status exams such as the MMSE should be included in whatever E/M service (99211-99215) is performed during that visit.