

Part B Insider (Multispecialty) Coding Alert

E/M CODING: You Can Bill A 99214 With Exam Of Only 2 Body Areas Or Systems

But don't assume you have a 99214 just because you have 5 or more

Are you a victim of the -detailed exam- myth? Don't miscode your evaluation & management visits based on numerical standards that may not apply.

A recent article in Part B Insider incorrectly stated that you need a physical exam of five to seven organ systems or body areas to bill 99214. (See PBI Vol.7, No. 39, -Coding Coach.-) In fact, the 1995 E/M guidelines as interpreted by the **Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services** (CMS) only call for two to seven organ systems or body areas.

Watch out: This misconception appears to be widespread. At least one **Blue Cross/Blue Shield** plan has said you need at least five systems or areas for a 99214. And this guidance also appears on the Web sites for the **American College of Emergency Physicians** and the **American Academy of Family Physicians**.

This is a -gross error,- says **Mary Falbo**, president of **Millennium Consulting** in Lansdale, PA. She blames big public accounting firms, which have been intimidated by a wave of audits of 99214s, for spreading this overly conservative guidance. -The large CPA firms decided to adopt that [rule] at one point,- she says.

-Just because specialty societies or CPA firms may state that- you need five systems, doesn't mean it will hold up in a Medicare or payor audit, adds Falbo.

Most carriers say you only need two to seven body areas or systems for a 99214, including **Empire, Trailblazer** and **HGSAdministrators**, says **Barbara Cobuzzi**, president of **CRN Healthcare Solutions** in Tinton Falls, NJ.

Check with your carrier: Some Part B carriers may actually have different E/M documentation requirements, notes Cobuzzi. CMS recently said that carriers are allowed to come up with their own interpretations of E/M guidelines and scoresheets. Already, Trailblazer has developed its own scoresheet, with different rules for medical decision-making.

Plus: For some specialties, such as ophthalmology or orthopedics, there may be no medical necessity to look at five or more body areas or organ systems, notes **Stephanie Jones**, chief auditing officer and VP of operations with **Parses Inc.** in Tampa, FL.

Editor's Note: For more information on correctly reporting 99214, turn to -How To Make Sure Your 99214s Measure Up,- on page 379.