

Part B Insider (Multispecialty) Coding Alert

MODIFIERS: For Pre-Operative E/M Visit, Intent Determines Your Modifier

Use -57 modifier only if the visit was directly related to the surgery

If your surgeon has an evaluation and management visit with a patient within one day of a surgery with a global period, you may need to use a modifier to obtain payment for that visit. But which modifier?

If the visit involved the decision to operate on the patient, then you can use the -57 modifier (Decision for surgery). But if the E/M wasn't actually related to the surgery, then you can use the -25 modifier (Significant, separately identifiable evaluation and management service by the same physician on the same day of the procedure or other service).

Sometimes, choosing one modifier or the other can be a challenge. The key question to ask is, "would the patient have gotten this if they didn't have the surgery?" says consultant **George Alex** with **Iatro** in Baltimore. If the patient had a wound infection or dehiscence, those things "would all be related to the surgery." But if the patient had a myocardial infarction right before surgery, that could be separate. Or if a patient waiting for cardiac bypass surgery developed a fever or urinary tract infection that would be separate.

The really questionable situations "are a pulmonary embolism or a blood clot in the leg," says Alex. The blood clot could be related to the reason for surgery, or unrelated.

The most important thing to remember is if you use the -25 modifier for an unrelated condition, you must provide a separate diagnosis, says consultant **Robyn Lee** with **Lee-Brooks Consulting** in Chicago. For example, some internal medicine physicians may need to refill a patient's prescription for hypertension medication on the same day that they later provide an unrelated colonoscopy, says consultant **Annette Grady** with **Eide Bailly** in Bismarck, ND.

Some carriers also require physicians to use the -25 for all preoperative visits, including the decision for surgery, if the procedure has a 10-day global period, notes Grady.

But remember, if an E/M happens the day before a surgery, the -25 modifier won't be available. In that case, just omit the modifier, advises consultant **Quinten Buechner** with **ProActive Consultants** in Cumberland, WI.