

Eli's Rehab Report

Reader Question: Concurrent Care vs. Consult

Question: One of my multiple sclerosis (340) patients was admitted to the hospital by her cardiologist. The cardiologist requested that I follow the patient pre- and postoperatively to help manage her severe spasms. The chart states that I am consulting, but I don't know if I can bill a consult, since I know the patient and have seen her in my office many times. My office manager told me that each doctor following the patient in the hospital has to have a different diagnosis unique to the problem they're addressing with the patient to ensure reimbursement. Is this accurate?

Maryland Subscriber

Answer: This would not meet the criteria of a consult (99251-99255) because you were asked to manage a particular aspect of care (the spasticity), and not to render an opinion, as would be required of a true consult. You should bill the subsequent hospital care codes, 99231-99233.

Regarding the different diagnoses, Medicare no longer requires that you must be treating a different diagnosis than the other physicians treating the patient. If there is a patient with one diagnosis who requires two physicians of different specialties, then you each can bill for your own services, as long as the services are medically necessary.

The Maryland Medicare carrier is Trailblazer. Its review policy refers to this as concurrent care, and requires that the role of each physician must be clearly defined to determine correct coverage. Trailblazer's policy states, Coverage can be allowed if each physician's services are established as reasonable and necessary as the result of an active concurrent role in the patient's treatment. This requirement can also be fulfilled if the patient's condition warrants the services of more than one physician on an attending rather than a consulting basis and all are determined to be reasonable and necessary. In making this determination, the specialty of each physician will be considered since the presence of multiple medical conditions may require diverse medical or surgical services. In your case, the patient's heart problems and multiple sclerosis most likely would qualify as multiple medical conditions.