

Eli's Rehab Report

Reader Question: Get A Therapy V-Code Refresher For SNFs And HHAs

Question: I've just relocated to a SNF setting from a hospital outpatient therapy department and am having trouble getting our therapy claims paid. Some of my colleagues have suggested that the problem could be with therapy V codes, but I'm not sure what to fix. Here's an example of a claim that was denied: A multidisciplinary case was admitted to our facility, where nurses, PTs and OTs cared for a patient experiencing an exacerbation of her multiple sclerosis (MS). The nursing staff adjusted her medication, occupational therapy addressed her increased muscle weakness, and physical therapy assisted her with correcting gait abnormality. The codes on the claim form follow: 340 (Multiple sclerosis), V57.21 (Encounter for occupational therapy), 728.87 (Muscle weakness [generalized]), V57.1 (Other physical therapy) and 781.2 (Abnormality of gait). Am I missing something here or should I appeal?

Answer: Your colleague was right. Your V codes are the problem. In the past, when billing received therapists' evaluation forms, many coders misused V57.x (Care involving use of rehabilitation procedures) as "procedure codes" to indicate that a patient was receiving therapy, when the V codes were only meant to indicate if therapy was the primary reason for admission.

According to the V-code guidelines for patients receiving therapy in SNFs and home health it all comes down to the question, "What was the primary reason the patient was admitted?" If therapy isn't the primary reason for admission, you should not even list a therapy V code. In your case, the patient wasn't admitted specifically for therapy but for her MS exacerbation -- and just happened to have therapy as part of her treatment.

If, however, your facility admits a patient whose only reason for admission is therapy, you should list V57.x -- and you must list it first. For example, a patient is admitted to a SNF after a fracture for physical therapy and occupational therapy.

Watch for: A patient receiving multiple disciplines (e.g., physical therapy and speech-language pathology) could trigger some improper use of V57.89 (Other multiple training or therapy).

Here's how: If a patient has multiple therapy disciplines involved, your therapists are probably managing exacerbations of a disease process, and if so, the disease process code should replace V57.89. The only time you can report V57.89 is when your therapists are providing more than one discipline for a therapy-only admit.

Tip: You may also want to be alert to Part B therapy cap exceptions claims. Just listing the V code for a therapy-only patient is not enough -- the claim needs to list the qualifying condition and complexities codes as well.

Question: We are currently building out our EMR content and the following questions came up about Physical Therapy techs.

1. Can a tech data enter the patient's history from the paper intake form for the PT to review and sign off on?
2. Can a tech document exercise flow sheets themselves in the EMR (document what they've done?) Some of our therapists are under the impression that techs are not allowed to document anything in the PT chart. Is this correct or not?

Answer: This is what our experts have to say:

"There is no one answer as it's state-practice-act specific and discipline specific. The therapist would need to read their respective state practice act to see if they can use support personnel, if so, what can they do, and they can document in the medical record," says **Rick Gawenda, PT**, President, **Gawenda Seminars & Consulting, Inc.**

"There's no one answer -- the rules vary from state to state, each state licensing board makes the rules," **PTPN** Director of Quality Assurance **Mitchel Kaye, PT**, says.

"It depends upon state law. In New York state techs have equivalent responsibilities as that of a medical assistant. So they are allowed to document certain things such as information from an intake form. They cannot document SOAP notes or observations (to remain compliant with privacy laws)," says **Ester Horowitz, CMC, CITRMS**, certified management counselor and owner/practice marketing advisor with **M2Power Inc.** in Merrick, N.Y.