

Outpatient Facility Coding Alert

Reader Question: Know the Difference between Partial, Complete Lymphadenectomy

Question: The provider excises the superficial lymph nodes in the right armpit area below the axillary vein, but not lymph nodes buried deep beneath the layers of muscle. What should be the appropriate procedure code for this?

Mississippi Subscriber

Answer: The correct code depends on how precisely the provider documented the depth of the excised lymph nodes. CPT® offers 38740 (Axillary lymphadenectomy; superficial), and 38745 (Axillary lymphadenectomy; complete). If the provider documents that she entered the muscle and removed deep lymph nodes in addition to superficial nodes, you may think of reporting 38745. Otherwise, report a superficial lymphadenectomy using 38740.

As per the description, this is a procedure of superficial axillary lymphadenectomy and the most appropriate code for this would be 38740 (Axillary lymphadenectomy; superficial). Remember that this code bundles into many other procedures for reporting extensive cancer of the chest wall.