

Outpatient Facility Coding Alert

Reader Question: Look For Infection While Reporting Wound Dehiscence

Question: What is the best strategy to get reimbursed for repair of wound dehiscence?

Georgia Subscriber

Answer: "Dehiscence" means splitting open or bursting. As such, wound dehiscence usually describes the opening up of a previously sutured area (for example, an incision following surgery, wound repair, etc.). If a wound becomes infected, it will more likely dehisce due to the natural inflammatory process.

Wound dehiscence code 12020 (Treatment of superficial wound dehiscence; simple closure) describes repair when there is no sign of infection. In this case, the dermatologist simply debrides and irrigates the wound and closes it in a single layer.

If infection is evident, the dermatologist may prefer to clean the wound and pack it with gauze strips, leaving the wound open to allow infection to drain. In this case, 12021 (... with packing) is the better choice. If the dehiscence has opened and requires closure in multiple layers, report 13160 (Secondary closure of surgical wound or dehiscence, extensive or complicated).