Home Health ICD-9/ICD-10 Alert

Reader Question: Gather Details for Pneumonia Diagnosis

Question: Our patient is diagnosed with "multilobar pneumonia." Which ICD-9 code should I report?

Mississippi Subscriber

Answer: When coding for pneumonia, you should do your best to identify the specific type, and code based on the causal organism.

The Coding Clinic emphasizes that the term "lobar pneumonia" is, in fact, outdated. In the past, "lobar pneumonia" "referred to pneumococcal pneumonia and at that time, pneumococcal pneumonia usually affected a single lobe; however, presently there are many causes of lobar pneumonia," Coding Clinic says.

Assign code 486 (Pneumonia, organism unspecified), if the provider is unable to identify the organism causing the multilobar pneumonia.

Important: If the physician uses nonspecific language, for instance 'healthcare-associated pneumonia' or 'nosocomial pneumonia,' you should clarify with him the specific bacterial type of the pneumonia.

Now's the time to communicate with physicians to ensure that they are properly documenting diagnoses. Remind them that accurate documentation will be more important than ever as the medical industry is on the cusp of ICD-10. Let them know that it will save everyone time (and bring in money faster) if coders can do their work quickly based on detailed documentation.