

OASIS Alert

Assessment: 'No' On M0440 Is Probably Wrong

So what is a skin lesion?

If you mark M0440 "no," you might want to examine the patient more carefully.

An accurate answer to M0440 will be "yes" 99 percent of the time, says consultant **Pat Sevast** with **American Express Tax & Business Services** in Timonium, MD - because most patients have some sort of bruise, cut, rash, pustule or scar.

Despite recent pressure ulcer instructions, chances are that even a patient with a healed stage 1 pressure ulcer won't have "no" on M0440.

The **Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services** defines a lesion very broadly as an area of pathologically altered tissue. "All alterations in skin integrity are considered to be lesions except alterations that end in 'ostomy'... or peripheral IV sites," the OASIS Implementation Manual instructs. Even persistent redness without a break in the skin is considered a lesion, CMS says.

Some skin conditions CMS considers lesions include wheals, vesicles and pustules (primary lesions), or lesions that arise from these, such as crusts, scars and ulcerations (secondary lesions). Other lesions you might see are cuts, skin tears, burns, rashes, surgical incisions and sores.

Patients often have areas of skin discoloration (macules and patches), changes in pigmentation or thickening epidermis (lichenification).

Don't overlook: Pin sites, surgical wounds with sutures or staple, central and PICC lines and implanted infusion or venous access devices also are lesions, CMS instructs.

Although marking "yes" on this question only brings extra reimbursement when the patient's diagnosis is a burn or trauma code, overall OASIS accuracy still is essential in dealings with surveyors and intermediaries.

Editor's Note: There are several good Web sites for increasing your understanding of different types of skin lesions including: www.pediatrics.wisc.edu/education/derm/test.html and www.verpleegkunde.com/tekst/HandbookofSkinDiseases.pdf.