

OASIS Alert

DIAGNOSIS CODING ~ Mental Status Codes Can Support Reimbursement

But beware of overuse.

A confused patient -- especially an elderly one -- could be suffering from a specific or a non-specific problem. Two new codes help you provide more information about these patients.

Many home care patients are confused as a result of infections, particularly urinary tract infections, experts say. Other sources of confusion are Alzheimer's or other dementias; drug side effects; postoperative effects of anesthesia or pain; dehydration, or sleep deprivation, says **Rena Shephard**, president of **RRS Consulting** in San Diego.

First Look for a Specific Cause

If you know the specific cause of a patient's confusion, you should put that code in the list of diagnosis codes in M0230 or M0240, says consultant **Lynn Yetman** with St. Petersburg, FL-based **Reingruber & Company**.

Example: If the patient exhibits confusion, but also has a urinary tract infection, report the UTI code, rather than the side effect of confusion, Yetman says.

Use New Code to Support Therapy Use

ICD-9-CM code 331.83 (Mild cognitive impairment, so stated) can explain why a patient needs more than the average amount of therapy, says consultant **Anne Cook**, of **Anne Cook and Associates**, Health Information Management Consultants in Marietta, GA. So 331.83 provides useful information if used correctly.

This code fits in section 331 (Other cerebral degenerations) of the ICD-9-CM codes, Cook says. Section 331 is in the "Nervous System" chapter, not in the "Symptoms" chapter, and includes Alzheimer's disease (331.0) and frontotemporal dementias, such as Picks disease (331.11).

Heads up: Physicians often use the term "mild cognitive impairment" to describe cognitive problems resulting from many underlying diagnoses, such as head trauma or strokes, says **Sue Bowman**, director of coding policy and compliance with the **American Health Information Management Association**. Be sure there is no identified underlying disease before using 331.83.

Look for Altered Mental Status Code Change

In the "Symptoms, Signs and Ill-Defined Conditions" chapter of the 2006 ICD-9-CM manual, code 780.99 (Other general symptoms) included amnesia, chills and generalized pain as well as altered mental status, Cook says. Now in the 2007 codes you have a specific code -- 780.97 -- for altered mental status.

Altered mental status may be a symptom of several different kinds of illnesses, says the ICD-9-CM Coordination and Maintenance Committee. These include trauma; infection; alcohol and drug ingestion; and endocrine, renal, neurological and psychological disorders, the committee says.

You would use 780.97 if you have observed or the family has reported a change from the baseline mental functioning, but you know of no specific cause, the committee explains.

Note: For detailed coding info, order Eli's Home Health ICD-9 Alert at 1-800-874-9180.