

OASIS Alert

Diagnosis Coding: t's Time To Swallow New Dysphagia Codes

More specificity required for speech therapy

When you code for a patient with stroke-related or other dysphagia, stopping too soon can lead to inadequate treatment, increased medical review and more payment denials.

The bottom line: You can no longer use the current code for dysphagia -- 787.2 -- after Oct. 1, because it now requires a fifth digit.

Beginning Oct. 1 home care coders must use the new ICD-9-CM codes the **Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services** released in June. Among these codes are six new dysphagia codes. These additional codes will indicate the phase of swallowing the dysphagia affects, says coding consultant **Tricia Twombly** with **Foundation Management Services** in Denton, TX.

Added complexity: As of Oct. 1, the late effect CVA with dysphagia code -- 438.82 -- will require that the dysphagia code be added to specify the phase of swallowing affected, warns **Jun Mapili**, coding supervisor with **Global Home Care** in Troy, MI. When these two codes are used together, the patient will accrue case mix points for added reimbursement, he adds.

The basics: Dysphagia is defined as difficulty swallowing, Mapili explains. Swallowing allows the body to securely transport food from the mouth to the stomach.

In this amazingly complex process, "conscious and unconscious events [are] carried out by over 40 pairs of muscles that have to be finely coordinated," Mapili says. Countless diseases affect this fundamental process, he says.

Code Dysphagia After Speech Therapy Evaluation

The speech therapist can select the correct code after completing the swallowing assessment, says **Lemmieta McNeilly** with the Rockville, MD-based **American Speech-Language-Hearing Association**, in a reminder to association members. The updated dysphagia codes are:

787.20 Dysphagia, unspecified

787.21 Dysphagia, oral phase

787.22 Dysphagia, oropharyngeal phase

787.23 Dysphagia, pharyngeal phase

787.24 Dysphagia, pharyngoesophageal phase

787.29 Other dysphagia

Note: For detailed explanations of dysphagia codes and other coding information, see the November issue of Eli's Home Health ICD-9 Alert. Subscribe by calling 1-800-874-9180 or online at <http://www.elihealthcare.com>.

