

OASIS Alert

Reader Question: Here's How To Stage Your Patients' Healing Wounds

Don't 'downstage' your patients' pressure ulcers.

Question: A patient entered our care with Stage II pressure ulcer that has now begun to heal. Can we change the stage of healing to Stage I?

Answer: You can't "downstage" or "reverse stage" pressure ulcers or other wounds, says the Laguna Beach-based **Wound, Ostomy and Continence Nurses Society (WOCN)**, which the **Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services** names as a key resources for wound staging along with the **National Pressure Ulcer Advisory Panel**.

"Pressure ulcers heal to progressively more shallow depth," but the original, healthy tissue is replaced with granulation tissue rather than normal tissue -- meaning a Stage IV ulcer can never become a Stage III, NPUAP explains.

Strategy: When a Stage IV pressure ulcer is partially healed, you should code it as "healed Stage IV" rather than simply re-staging it, WOCN states.

Caveat: Stage I and II wounds do have the potential to heal, according to the **OASIS Implementation Manual of January 2008**. However, you should follow the same rules as with more serious ulcers. So, rather than downstaging a Stage II to a Stage I as it heals, you should code it as a "healed Stage II."

"All agencies must ensure that their clinicians are educated on all information, guidance and guidelines which are documented as references" by CMS for OASIS, urges **Marianne Rone**, RN, director of clinical services for **Healthcare Provider Solutions** in Nashville, Tenn.

And CMS' reliance on WOCN and NPUAP is unlikely to waver after OASIS-C is finalized, Rone says. "These organizations will provide additional information to assist clinicians in documentation, not necessarily changes," Rone predicts.

Note: You can view WOCN's wound staging advice at www.wocn.org/pdfs/WOCN_Library/Position_Statements/PressureUlcerStaging.pdf and NPUAP's guidance is at www.npuap.org/positn5.htm.