

Welcome!

Greetings, and welcome to all of our new subscribers! We hope you are enjoying your summer, and have been able to spend a least a little time away from your desk and out in the sun.

Here at Spring Management we've been busy brainstorming ideas for our next release of E&M Coder. We're very excited about some of our upcoming enhancements, and look forward to sharing these with you in the near future!

In this month's issue, we'll discuss everything from getting your money's worth from accurate coding, to protecting your computer from unpleasant viruses. As always, our goal is to provide you with the tools and tips you need to make your job easier!

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The Art of Coding Accurately



In 1997, Medicare published the "Documentation Guidelines for Evaluation and Management Services" in an attempt to clarify the differences in E/M code services and to better define how E/M codes were to be used. However, even with current guidelines there is continuing confusion over the complexity of Medicare's rules and how they are to be applied.

As a result of this confusion, combined with the fear of harsh punishment for over-coding, many physicians tend to under-code in hopes of avoiding negative audit results. In fact, according to a study done several years ago, it was discovered that physicians typically under code approximately 30% of the time, representing a significant loss in legitimate revenue.

The interesting truth is that most practices can significantly improve their situation NOT by changing the way they take care of patients, but simply by coding more accurately. A better understanding of the codes and a more consistent approach to proper documentation will generally increase coding levels and so increase Medicare reimbursement.

A good case in point is the prevalence of coding a 99213 when actually a code of 99214 would be more appropriate. According to the guidelines, a 99214 is defined as one having a *detailed history, detailed examination and medical decision making of moderate complexity*. In addition, **only two** of the three key components are required for a level-IV code.

A detailed history requires documentation of at least four elements in the HPI, a review of two organ systems, and one element of the PFSH. Remember that CPT considers the

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Color Coding as a Training Tool

With today's concern over consistent and compliant coding procedures, the savvy professional coder is always on the lookout for tools to streamline the process and insure more accurate coding. E&M Coder v7.0 is such a tool, intended to provide an easy-to-use guide to the definitions and guidelines documented in the American Medical Association Current Procedural Terminology: CPT 2004 Manual for Evaluation and Management.

Based on the items selected within the **Three Key Components:** History, Examination,

and Medical Decision Making, E&M Coder automatically calculates the corresponding Evaluation and Management CPT Code. Items that are completed and documented during the patient encounter are quickly selected from predefined on-screen lists.



What makes E&M Coder v7.0 truly unique, however, is the running, *color-coded* display of current exam levels at the bottom of each screen, providing an effective visual guide to the documented guidelines. The use of primary colors to define levels allows the coder to quickly identify at a glance whether or not appropriate documentation levels have been achieved.

To use E&M Coder as a training tool, simply select three or four sample charts for data entry. It may be helpful to

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Pro Coder Tech Tip**Are YOU Safe?****Firewalls and Anti-Virus Software**

It's a new and exciting age, with information from all corners of the world available to us at the touch of a keyboard. The rapid development of the Internet over the last ten years has given all of us the power to "know" in a way that surpasses previous generations. There are, however, risks involved with accessing this information.

If you use the Internet regularly, you've probably had that uncomfortable moment when your system begins to act strangely, slowing down to a crawl, or throwing pop-up windows on screen every few seconds. You can't help but wonder if the worst has happened - a virus or worm has snuck in to do damage.

In recent years, the threat of virus infections and personal information theft has grown, and should concern everyone who does business on the Internet. Broadband or DSL users are at the highest risk because they provide an "always on" connection, or 24 hour access to their computer. There are, however, a growing number of products available that are designed to keep your computer system safe.

Firewalls:

A firewall protects you from hackers who search for DSL or Broadband customers. Firewalls can either be a piece of hardware that physically connects to your equipment, or software that runs on your computer system. Personal firewalls will also keep your private information from being sent out without your knowledge.

Although firewalls are an excellent first line of defense, they do not, however, scan incoming email or email attachments for viruses that could harm your computer. For this you need a reputable anti-virus software.

Anti-Virus Software:

McAfee and Symantec are two popular suppliers of anti-virus software that can be purchased for about \$50. Be sure, however, that the software you choose includes regular updates. Only by keeping your anti-virus software updated will you effectively catch the many new and changing viruses that regularly appear in the electronic world.

Some firewalls are now being packaged with

anti-virus software, providing a convenient all-around solution. For example, www.ZoneLabs.com sells a single user license for their ZoneAlarm software for \$69.95, which includes firewall protection, comprehensive anti-virus software, and a year of support and updates.



For more information on current virus outbreaks and firewall products, try the following links:

<http://www.howstuffworks.com/firewall.htm> : Good general information on what firewalls are and how they work.

http://www.techdirectory.ws/Computer_Security/Firewalls/default.aspx: Directory of websites offering firewall products and info.

<http://www.sarc.com>: Symantec's public list of current viruses and how to protect yourself from them.

Do You Know the Difference?**Virus**

A virus is a program that spreads by infecting other programs on the same computer. Some viruses can do serious damage, while others may simply display annoying messages. True viruses cannot spread to a new computer without human assistance, such as on a floppy or by an email attachment.

Worm

Worms are similar to viruses, with the exception that they can spread themselves automatically over the network from one computer to the next by taking advantage of automatic file sending and receiving features found on many computers.

Trojan horse

A Trojan horse refers to programs that appear desirable, but actually contain something harmful. The harmful contents could be something simple, for example you may download what looks like a free game, but when you run it, it erases every file in that directory. The trojan's contents could also be a virus or worm, which then spread the damage.

Subscriber Discount!

We're pleased to offer a special discount to all of our valued newsletter subscribers on purchases of **E&M Coder 7.0**. Simply mention the following discount code when ordering (**N401080**) and receive a 10% discount!

Color Coding as a Training Tool - continued

select a variety of charts, including those difficult to code, as well as those straightforward to code. By entering sample chart data into the system, E&M Coder will interactively teach by displaying the appropriate levels achieved for each area within the three key components of History, Exam, and Medical Decision making. This process also provides the Documented CPT code and Optimal CPT code.

The **Documented** field, located at the bottom right of all screens, displays the Evaluation and Management CPT code qualified for, based on the items completed in History, Exam, and Decision.

The **Optimal** field, also located at the bottom right, displays the *potential* Evaluation and Management CPT code qualified for.

The attending clinician may use this information to determine if further data gathering and documentation is

needed. This is NOT the CPT code

to be assigned to a patient encounter or a required level to be met.

Note that ideally the levels of History and Exam should be in line with the level of the Medical Decision. When this occurs, the Documented CPT code is the highest possible CPT code and the Optimal CPT code field is blank. However, if an Optimal CPT code is displayed, it indicates a higher (or lower) Medical Decision Level than History and Exam Levels currently support.

The use of a color-coded level display, in conjunction with an accurate CPT code calculator provides a simple and intuitive method for training staff on proper coding techniques.

To learn more about our products, or to find

out how you can request a live demo for your group or Chapter, please call us at (800) 585-6337 and one of our helpful staff will be happy to assist you. Or visit us on the web at www.emcoder.com.

Don't wait another minute to see for yourself how **E&M Coder™ 7.0** can make your job easier!

Coming
Soon!

New Online Ordering

As of September 1st, our website at www.emcoder.com will include an easy-to-use online ordering option for purchases of E&M Coder v7.0. Simply go to the Products page and click on **Secure Online Order** to take advantage of this convenient new feature. After your order has been submitted, one of our staff will call to confirm your order, and to verify your shipping address. It's that simple!

Got IDEAS?

The staff here at Spring Management have been busy talking with customers and developing a list of ideas for our next version of E&M Coder. Our goal, as always, is to produce a product that gives you just what you need as an E/M Coder. If you have suggestions on what you'd like to see in a Coding package, we'd love to hear from you! Just send us a note at info@emcoder.com

Be looking for a preview of the ideas we've chosen in our next issue of **EMCoder Uplink**.

We look forward to hearing from you!

The Art of Coding Accurately - continued

review of a patient's medications and responses to treatment to be a component of the patient's past history. In most cases, more comprehensive documentation is all that is necessary to complete the requirements for a detailed history.

A detailed exam must include the exam of at least five organ systems OR 12 specific exam elements. In general the first requirement is somewhat easier to document, and often reached when examining patients with multiple chronic conditions.

Medical decision making of moderate complexity is based on two of three factors:

- The diagnoses and management options being considered.
- The data to be reviewed
- The risk involved

When determining the complexity of a medical decision, consider whether multiple medical problems are being dealt with, several data elements require review, and the level of uncertainty of straightforward diagnoses. Often a more complex decision process is taken for granted and improperly documented, resulting in lower overall levels.

In reality, the difference between an E/M code of 99213 and the higher level IV code of 99214 is often nothing more than a clear and complete system of docu-

mentation combined with a consistent method of analysis.

To better achieve the goal of accurate coding, professional E/M coders are encouraged to regularly review their procedures and self-audit their results. In addition, the use of reputable quick reference guides and coding software often significantly improves overall accuracy and in turn increases revenues by eliminating under coding.

FREE Toolbox!

As a subscriber to our newsletter, you are qualified to receive a variety of free tools designed to help you compare your Practice statistics to National data. Currently our tool list is as follows:

- **E/M Trends Comparison** - Allows you to compare your code frequency with National Trend data.
- **E/M Growth Comparison** - Compare your own Practice's growth with National figures.
- **E/M Fee Trends Tool** - Compare your Practice billing info with national Medicare figures.

To get your free tools, visit us on the web at:

<http://www.emcoder.com/emcodernewsletter.com>



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Upgrade your E&M Coder now and get:

- Complete 2004 Evaluation and Management Codes
- Teaching Physician Guidelines
- HIPAA Compliant Reporting
- Bell-curve Comparison Graphs by Specialty
- Audit Report highlighting Visits without a Chief Complaint

And much more...

Call us at 800-585-6337 to order your upgrade today!