

# ICD-10 Codes: More Specificity With More Characters

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## Practice Points

- The addition of characters in *International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision, Clinical Modification (ICD-10-CM)* codes will permit more information about the visit to be communicated to payors and statisticians.
- Codes with *ICD-10-CM* will be 3 to 7 characters long and indicate the disease category, followed by the related etiology, anatomic site, severity, and other vital clinical details. The last character is 1 of 3 letters to indicate if the visit is an initial encounter, subsequent encounter, or sequela.

As I have mentioned in prior columns, the key to success with *International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision, Clinical Modification (ICD-10-CM)* coding will be additional specificity, which will come in the form of more characters to communicate with payors and statisticians regarding the services that have been provided during the office visit. The addition of characters will permit more information about the visit to be delivered in the code.

Some of these additional characters will be required to submit the code for processing. Specifically look out for codes that communicate accidents or injury. Some common circumstances for dermatologists will be lacerations, abrasions, laceration repairs, and burns. The structure of the *ICD-10-CM* codes

is outlined below to explain circumstances in which the increased number of characters will be most important for dermatologists.

The *ICD-10-CM* codes will be 3 to 7 characters long.<sup>1</sup> The first 3 characters are the general categories. For example, L70 is the 3-character category for acne and L40 is the category for psoriasis. The next 3 characters (ie, characters 4–6) correspond to the related etiology (ie, the cause, set of causes, manner of causation of a disease or condition), anatomic site, severity, and other vital clinical details.<sup>1</sup>

Take the case of a burn on the hand. With the *International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision*, a first-degree burn on the back of the hand is coded with 5 characters (944.16).<sup>2</sup> According to the *ICD-10-CM* coding system, the code for an initial visit for a first-degree burn on the back of the hand would include 7 characters (T23.169A).<sup>1</sup> There will be times when the sixth character may not be necessary; in these instances, an X must be placed in this position as a placeholder, but the absence of a sixth character does not negate the need for a seventh. Thankfully, the seventh character can only be 1 of 3 letters. As illustrated above in the code for a first-degree burn on the back of the hand, the A designates an initial encounter; a D would designate a

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follow-up visit for this burn, and an S would represent a sequela from the initial burn, such as a postinflammatory change, which would have its own code.<sup>1</sup>

### Conclusion

To be reimbursed, appropriate *ICD-10-CM* codes must be used. Be sure to master the structure of these codes before the October 1, 2015, compliance deadline; plan now for a training and testing period.

### REFERENCES

1. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. *ICD-10-CM Tabular List of Diseases and Injuries*. [http://www.cms.gov/Medicare/Coding/ICD10/downloads/6\\_I10tab2010.pdf](http://www.cms.gov/Medicare/Coding/ICD10/downloads/6_I10tab2010.pdf). Published 2010. Accessed September 18, 2014.
2. ICD-9 code lookup. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services Web site. <http://www.cms.gov/medicare-coverage-database/staticpages/icd-9-code-lookup.aspx>. Accessed September 18, 2014.

### QUICK POLL QUESTION



**Have you started to provide your staff with comprehensive training and testing for the transition to ICD-10?**

- a.** yes
- b.** no, but I have a plan in place
- c.** no, I'm not sure where to begin

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