



Coding Associated Diabetic Conditions LINKING CAUSE-AND-EFFECT RELATIONSHIPS

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The prevalence of diabetes in the United States is on the rise in both adult and pediatric patient populations. Between 1980 and 2008, the number of diabetics more than doubled — from 153 million to 347 million (Brown, 2011).

Diabetes, a chronic disease marked by high levels of blood glucose resulting from defects in insulin production, insulin action, or both, is listed as seventh on the Center for Disease Control's top ten leading causes of death. With diabetes affecting around 29.1 million people, health care professionals are diagnosing and treating more diabetic cases, and that means coders are coding diabetes with regular frequency (CDC, 2011).

Coding professionals have been cautious when linking conditions in terms of cause-and-effect yielding only when guidelines specifically defined the relationships, e.g. hypertension and chronic kidney disease. Even though the medical evidence linked diabetes and its relationship to heart and kidney diseases, coding professionals have not linked conditions to diabetes when physician medical record documentation lacked indications of cause-and-effect relationship between the diabetes and the condition. It is no wonder that diabetes continues to be a challenge for coding professionals since the ICD-10-CM Official Guidelines for Coding and Reporting were

released. In Section I.A.15, it states that the word "with" should be interpreted to mean "associated with" or "due to" when it appears in a code title, the Alphabetic Index, or an instructional note in the Tabular List (CMS, n.d.).

There are 53 instances of "with" sub-term conditions listed under the main term Diabetes. Following this guidance, as we look to the main term Diabetes in the ICD-10-CM Codebook Index, any of the conditions under the subterm "with" (i.e. gangrene, neuropathy, amyotrophy) can be coded without the physician stating that these conditions are linked. If the physician does not implicitly or explicitly link one of the conditions listed under "with" in the index, the classification assumes a cause-and-effect relationship between diabetes and certain diseases of the kidneys, nerves, and circulatory system.

For coding professionals, this new guideline provides guidance about linking conditions with diabetes in absence of physician documentation linking the conditions with the diabetes. As the great Greek philosopher Plato said, "to be sure I must; and therefore I may assume that your silence gives consent." The ICD-10-CM Official Guidelines for Coding and Reporting, Section I.A.15 gives coding professionals piece of mind to link diabetic complications when the

physician documentation is silent on the cause-and-effect relationship.

References

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