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FOCUS ON: ATRIAL FIBRILLATION

"Atrial fibrillation is the most common arrhythmia in clinical practice, accounting for approximately one-third of hospitalizations for cardiac rhythm disturbances."¹ As with other chronic conditions, atrial fibrillation and other arrhythmias must be assessed, documented and accurately coded each calendar year. Because patients with atrial fibrillation often have other chronic conditions (e.g. heart failure), these, too, should be assessed, documented and coded as well. Since many patients with atrial fibrillation are on chronic warfarin therapy, the appropriate "V" code should be used in addition to the code for atrial fibrillation.

Documentation Tips

Documentation for heart arrhythmias that clearly identifies the condition promotes better quality of care. Nonspecific documentation will always lead to nonspecific medical coding.

Always document and code other diagnoses that were assessed at the time of the patient's visit, for example:

Assessment: Patient with chronic atrial fibrillation, rate controlled with beta blocker, with stable congestive heart failure. Remains on chronic warfarin, INR therapeutic.

427.31 Atrial fibrillation

428.0 Congestive heart failure, unspecified

V58.61 Long-term (current) use of anticoagulants

Patients who were converted to normal sinus rhythm (NSR) from atrial fibrillation and remain on medication to maintain NSR should still be coded as atrial fibrillation.

Assessment: Successful cardioversion of atrial fibrillation one month ago, stable on amiodarone and remains in normal sinus rhythm.

427.31 Atrial fibrillation

Always...

- Assess and document cardiac arrhythmias at least annually.
- Code to the highest level of specificity; avoid use of "unspecified" codes.
- Code other chronic conditions evaluated at time of visit, e.g. heart failure.

Coding Pearls

Consider the following codes in identifying the arrhythmia:

427.0 Paroxysmal supraventricular tachycardia

427.1 Paroxysmal ventricular tachycardia

427.2 Paroxysmal tachycardia, unspecified

427.31 Atrial fibrillation

427.32 Atrial flutter

427.41 Ventricular fibrillation

427.42 Ventricular flutter

427.5 Cardiac arrest

427.60 Premature beats, unspecified

427.61 Supraventricular premature beats

427.69 Premature beats, other

427.81 Sinoatrial node dysfunction

Sinus bradycardia: persistent or severe

Syndrome: sick sinus or tachycardia-bradycardia

DEF: Complex cardiac arrhythmia; appears as severe sinus bradycardia, sinus bradycardia with tachycardia, or sinus bradycardia with atrioventricular block²

427.89 Other specified cardiac dysrhythmias

Rhythm disorder: coronary sinus, ectopic or nodal

Wandering (atrial) pacemaker

427.9 Cardiac dysrhythmia, unspecified

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1 ACC/AHA/ESC "2006 Guidelines for the Management of Patients with Atrial Fibrillation." American College of Cardiology <www.acc.org>

2 Ingenix ICD-9-CM 2010 Expert for Physicians Vol 1 & 2