



Documentation Tips – Orthopedic Surgery

Principal Diagnoses:

- A potential principal diagnosis is any condition present on admission, requiring admission and treated (may be more than one)
- Explain etiology where possible (pathologic fracture due to osteomalacia, renal disease, etc.)
- Explain conditions which are “out of the ordinary,” particularly where they contribute to complexity (for example – THA with acetabular protrusion)

Secondary Diagnoses:

- Include all diagnoses present on admission which are in any way treated (re-exam, testing, meds, etc.)
- Explain why the patient is at higher risk
- Utilize medical consults where appropriate to improve specificity of diagnoses

Conditions Arising During Hospitalization:

- Clearly describe your impression whether the condition is due to an underlying illness or is a complication of care
- Consider documenting a diagnosis any time you do something to a patient (straight cath – *acute urinary retention*)
- Beware of describing conditions in the post-op period as “post-op;” *post-op hypertension*, for example, codes as a complication – explain the etiology *exacerbation essential hypertension*
- When describing a condition – explain the cause
 - “*Acute Blood Loss Anemia Secondary to Fracture*”
 - Tells a coder the blood loss was due to injury, not surgery

Pearls for Orthopedic Documentation

- Describe Your “Clinical Impression”
 - Diagnoses are rarely “certain”
 - You don’t have to have proof



- You can use words like probable, likely, etc.
- Describe Your “Clinical Impression” of etiology
 - You would get higher severity for “Severe DJD R knee secondary to diabetic neuropathy” than just DJD knee
- Pathologic Fracture (can also use osteoporotic fx)
 - A pathologic fx is a fracture occurring in diseased bone (metabolic bone disease, osteoporosis, malignancy) secondary to minimal or no trauma
 - Consider in all senile low velocity compression fxs
- Congestive Heart Failure
 - CHF no longer adds to severity
 - Chronic systolic, diastolic or combined failure adds minor comorbidity (severity)
 - Acute systolic, diastolic or combined failure adds a major comorbidity (severity)
 - Keep on your medical consultants to be specific
- Surgery
 - Describe all components of a surgical procedure, they sometimes add complexity (which may benefit your professional billing as well)
- Xray Reports
 - If an xray report (routine chest film for example) demonstrates a clinical diagnosis, coders can’t code from an “interpreting physician’s report”
 - Document the condition in the progress notes
 - *Severe Interstitial Pulmonary Fibrosis*