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CHAPTER VI
SURGERY: DIGESTIVE SYSTEM
CPT CODES 40000 - 49999
FOR
NATIONAL CORRECT CODING INITIATIVE POLICY MANUAL
FOR MEDICARE SERVICES

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Chapter VI
Surgery: Digestive System
CPT Codes 40000 - 49999

A. Introduction

The principles of correct coding discussed in Chapter I apply to the CPT codes in the range 40000-49999. Several general guidelines are repeated in this Chapter. However, those general guidelines from Chapter I not discussed in this Chapter are nonetheless applicable.

Physicians should report the HCPCS/CPT code that describes the procedure performed to the greatest specificity possible. A HCPCS/CPT code should be reported only if all services described by the code are performed. A physician should not report multiple HCPCS/CPT codes if a single HCPCS/CPT code exists that describes the services. This type of unbundling is incorrect coding.

HCPCS/CPT codes include all services usually performed as part of the procedure as a standard of medical/surgical practice. A physician should not separately report these services simply because HCPCS/CPT codes exist for them.

Specific issues unique to this section of CPT are clarified in this Chapter.

B. Evaluation and Management (E&M) Services

Medicare Global Surgery Rules define the rules for reporting evaluation and management (E&M) services with procedures covered by these rules. This section summarizes some of the rules.

All procedures on the Medicare Physician Fee Schedule are assigned a Global period of 000, 010, 090, XXX, YYY, or ZZZ. The global concept does not apply to XXX procedures. The global period for YYY procedures is defined by the Carrier. All procedures with a global period of ZZZ are related to another procedure, and the applicable global period for the ZZZ code is determined by the related procedure.

Since NCCI edits are applied to same day services by the same provider to the same beneficiary, certain Global Surgery Rules are applicable to NCCI. An E&M service is separately reportable

on the same date of service as a procedure with a global period of 000, 010, or 090 under limited circumstances.

If a procedure has a global period of 090 days, it is defined as a major surgical procedure. If an E&M is performed on the same date of service as a major surgical procedure for the purpose of deciding whether to perform this surgical procedure, the E&M service is separately reportable with modifier -57. Other E&M services on the same date of service as a major surgical procedure are included in the global payment for the procedure and are not separately reportable. NCCI does not contain edits based on this rule because Medicare Carriers have separate edits.

If a procedure has a global period of 000 or 010 days, it is defined as a minor surgical procedure. The decision to perform a minor surgical procedure is included in the payment for the minor surgical procedure and should not be reported separately as an E&M service. However, a significant and separately identifiable E&M service unrelated to the decision to perform the minor surgical procedure is separately reportable with modifier -25. The E&M service and minor surgical procedure do not require different diagnoses. If a minor surgical procedure is performed on a new patient, the same rules for reporting E&M services apply. The fact that the patient is “new” to the provider is not sufficient alone to justify reporting an E&M service on the same date of service as a minor surgical procedure. NCCI does contain some edits based on these principles, but the Medicare Carriers have separate edits. Neither the NCCI nor Carriers have all possible edits based on these principles.

Example: If a physician determines that a new patient with head trauma requires sutures, confirms the allergy and immunization status, obtains informed consent, and performs the repair, an E&M service is not separately reportable. However, if the physician also performs a medically reasonable and necessary full neurological examination, an E&M service may be separately reportable.

Procedures with a global surgery indicator of “XXX” are not covered by these rules. Many of these “XXX” procedures are performed by physicians and have inherent pre-procedure, intra-procedure, and post-procedure work usually performed each time the procedure is completed. This work should never be reported as a separate E&M code. Other “XXX” procedures are not usually performed by a physician and have no physician work relative

value units associated with them. A physician should never report a separate E&M code with these procedures for the supervision of others performing the procedure or for the interpretation of the procedure. With most “XXX” procedures, the physician may, however, perform a significant and separately identifiable E&M service on the same day of service which may be reported by appending modifier –25 to the E&M code. This E&M service may be related to the same diagnosis necessitating performance of the “XXX” procedure but cannot include any work inherent in the “XXX” procedure, supervision of others performing the “XXX” procedure, or time for interpreting the result of the “XXX” procedure. Appending modifier –25 to a significant, separately identifiable E&M service when performed on the same date of service as an “XXX” procedure is correct coding.

C. Endoscopic Services

Endoscopic services may be performed in many places of service (e.g., office, outpatient, ambulatory surgical centers (ASC)). Services that are an integral component of an endoscopic procedure are not separately reportable. These services include, but are not limited to, venous access (e.g., CPT code 36000), infusion/injection (e.g., CPT codes 90760-90775), non-invasive oximetry (e.g., CPT codes 94760 and 94761), and anesthesia provided by the surgeon.

1. Per *CPT Manual* instructions, surgical endoscopy includes diagnostic endoscopy. A diagnostic endoscopy HCPCS/CPT code should not be reported with a surgical endoscopy code.

2. If multiple endoscopic services are performed, the most comprehensive code describing the service(s) rendered should be reported. If multiple services are performed and not adequately described by a single HCPCS/CPT code, more than one code may be reported. The multiple procedure modifier -51 should be appended to the secondary HCPCS/CPT code. Only medically necessary services may be reported. Incidental examination of other areas should not be reported separately.

3. If the same endoscopic procedure (e.g., polypectomy) is performed multiple times at a single patient encounter in the same region as defined by the *CPT Manual* narrative, only one CPT code may be reported with one unit of service.

4. Gastroenterologic tests included in CPT code range 91000-91299 are frequently complementary to endoscopic procedures. Esophageal and gastric washings for cytology when performed are integral components of an upper gastrointestinal endoscopy (CPT code 43235). Therefore, CPT codes 91000 (esophageal intubation and collection of washings for cytology. . .) and 91055 (gastric intubation, washings, and preparing slides for cytology . . .) should not be separately reported when performed as part of an upper gastrointestinal endoscopic procedure. Provocative testing (CPT code 91052) may be expedited during gastrointestinal endoscopy (e.g., procurement of gastric specimens). When performed concurrent with an upper gastrointestinal endoscopy, CPT code 91052 should be coded with modifier -52 indicating a reduced level of service was performed.

5. If an endoscopy or enteroscopy is performed as a common standard of practice when performing another service, the endoscopy or enteroscopy is not separately reportable. For example, if a small intestinal endoscopy or enteroscopy is performed during the creation or revision of an enterostomy, the small intestinal endoscopy or enteroscopy is not separately reportable.

6. A “scout” endoscopy to assess anatomic landmarks or assess extent of disease preceding another surgical procedure at the same patient encounter is not separately reportable. However, an endoscopic procedure for diagnostic purposes to decide whether a more extensive open procedure needs to be performed is separately reportable. In the latter situation, modifier -58 may be utilized to indicate that the diagnostic endoscopy and more extensive open procedure were staged procedures.

7. If esophageal dilation as described by CPT codes 43450-43458 is unsuccessful and followed by an endoscopic esophageal dilation procedure, only the endoscopic esophageal dilation procedure may be reported. The physician should not report the unsuccessful procedure.

8. If it is necessary to perform diagnostic or surgical endoscopy of the hepatic/biliary/pancreatic system utilizing different methodologies (e.g., biliary T-tube endoscopy, ERCP) multiple CPT codes may be reported. Modifier -51 indicating multiple procedures were performed at the same patient encounter should be appended.

9. Intubation of the gastrointestinal tract (e.g., percutaneous placement of G-tube) includes subsequent removal of the tube. CPT codes such as 43247 (upper gastrointestinal endoscopic removal of foreign body) should not be reported for routine removal of previously placed therapeutic devices.

10. Rules for reporting biopsies performed at the same patient encounter as an excision, destruction, or other type of removal are discussed in Section F (General Policy Statements) (#17).

11. Control of bleeding is an integral component of endoscopic procedures and is not separately reportable. If it is necessary to repeat an endoscopy to control bleeding at a separate patient encounter on the same date of service, the HCPCS/CPT code for endoscopy for control of bleeding is separately reportable with modifier -78 indicating that the procedure required return to the operating room (or endoscopy suite) for a related procedure during the postoperative period.

12. Only the more extensive endoscopic procedure may be reported for a patient encounter. For example if a sigmoidoscopy is completed and the physician also performs a colonoscopy during the same patient encounter, only the colonoscopy may be reported.

13. If an endoscopic procedure fails and is converted into an open procedure at the same patient encounter, only the open procedure is reportable.

14. If a transabdominal colonoscopy via colostomy(CPT code 45355) and/or standard sigmoidoscopy or colonoscopy is performed as a necessary part of an open procedure (e.g., colectomy), the endoscopic procedure(s) is (are) not separately reportable. However, if either endoscopic procedure is performed as a diagnostic procedure upon which the decision to perform the open procedure is made, the endoscopic procedure may be reported separately. Modifier -58 may be utilized to indicate that the diagnostic endoscopy and the open procedure were staged or planned services.

15. If the larynx is viewed through an esophagoscope or upper gastrointestinal endoscope during endoscopy, a laryngoscopy CPT code cannot be reported separately. However, if a medically necessary laryngoscopy is performed with a separate laryngoscope,

both the laryngoscopy and esophagoscopy (or upper gastro-intestinal endoscopy) CPT codes may be reported with NCCI-associated modifiers.

D. Abdominal Procedures

During an open abdominal procedure exploration of the surgical field is routinely performed to identify anatomic structures and disease. An exploratory laparotomy (CPT code 49000) is not separately reportable with an open abdominal procedure.

Hepatectomy procedures (e.g., CPT codes 47120-47130, 47133-47142) include removal of the gallbladder based on anatomic considerations and standards of practice. A cholecystectomy CPT code is not separately reportable with a hepatectomy CPT code.

A medically necessary appendectomy may be reported separately. However, an incidental appendectomy of a normal appendix during another abdominal procedure is not separately reportable.

If a hernia repair is performed at the site of an incision for an open abdominal procedure, the hernia repair (CPT codes 49560-49566) is not separately reportable. The hernia repair is separately reportable if it is performed at a site other than the incision and is medically reasonable and necessary. An incidental hernia repair is not medically reasonable and necessary and should not be reported separately.

If a recurrent hernia requires repair, a recurrent hernia repair code may be reported. A code for incisional hernia repair should not be reported in addition to the recurrent hernia repair code unless a medically necessary incisional hernia repair is performed at a different site. In the latter case, modifier -59 should be appended to the incisional hernia repair code.

Removal of excessive skin and subcutaneous tissue (panniculectomy) at the site of an abdominal incision for an open procedure including hernia repair is not separately reportable. CPT code 15830 should not be reported for this type of panniculectomy. However, an abdominoplasty which requires significantly more work than a panniculectomy is separately reportable. In order to report an abdominoplasty in 2007, CPT requires the physician to report an infraumbilical abdominal panniculectomy (CPT code 15830 in 2007) plus the add-on CPT code 15847 for the abdominoplasty. Since NCCI bundles CPT code 15830

(in 2007) into abdominal wall hernia repair CPT codes, a provider should report CPT codes 15830 plus 15847 with modifier -59 appended to CPT code 15830 in order to report an abdominoplasty with an abdominal hernia repair CPT code.

CPT code 49568 is an add-on code describing implantation of mesh or other prosthesis for incisional or ventral hernia repair. This code may be reported with incisional or ventral hernia repair CPT codes 49560-49566. Although mesh or other prosthesis may be implanted with other types of hernia repairs, CPT code 49568 should not be reported with these other hernia repair codes. If a provider performs an incisional or ventral hernia repair with mesh/prosthesis implantation as well as another type of hernia repair at the same patient encounter, CPT code 49568 may be reported with modifier -59 to bypass edits bundling CPT code 49568 into all hernia repair codes other than the incisional or ventral hernia repair codes.

Open enterolysis (CPT code 44005) and laparoscopic enterolysis (CPT code 44200) are defined by the *CPT Manual* as “separate procedures”. They are not separately reportable with other intra-abdominal or pelvic procedures. However, if a provider performs an extensive and time-consuming enterolysis in conjunction with another intra-abdominal or pelvic procedure, the provider may append modifier -22 to the CPT code describing the latter procedure. The local carrier will determine whether additional payment is appropriate.

Per *CPT Manual* instructions, a diagnostic laparoscopy (CPT code 49320) is not separately reportable with a surgical laparoscopy.

E. Laparoscopy

1. Surgical laparoscopy includes diagnostic laparoscopy which is not separately reportable. If a diagnostic laparoscopy leads to a surgical laparoscopy at the same patient encounter, only the surgical laparoscopy may be reported.

2. If a laparoscopy is performed as a “scout” procedure to assess the surgical field or extent of disease, it is not separately reportable. If a diagnostic laparoscopy leads to the performance of an open procedure, the diagnostic laparoscopy may be separately reportable. Modifier -58 may be reported to indicate that the diagnostic laparoscopy and non-laparoscopic therapeutic procedures were staged or planned procedures. The

medical record must indicate the medical necessity for the diagnostic laparoscopy.

3. If a laparoscopic procedure is converted to an open procedure, only the open procedure may be reported.

4. Laparoscopic lysis of adhesions (CPT codes 44180 or 58660) is not separately reportable with other surgical laparoscopic procedures.

F. Medically Unlikely Edits (MUEs)

1. MUEs are described in Chapter I, Section V.

2. Providers/suppliers should be cautious about reporting services on multiple lines of a claim utilizing modifiers to bypass MUEs. MUEs were set so that such occurrences should be uncommon. If a provider/supplier does this frequently for any HCPCS/CPT code, the provider/supplier may be coding units of service incorrectly. The provider/supplier should consider contacting his/her national healthcare organization or the national medical/surgical society whose members commonly perform the procedure to clarify the correct reporting of units of service. A national healthcare organization, provider/supplier, or other interested third party may request a reconsideration of the MUE value of a HCPCS/CPT code by CMS by writing the MUE contractor, Correct Coding Solutions, LLC, at the address indicated in Chapter I, Section V.

G. General Policy Statements

1. In this Manual many policies are described utilizing the term “physician”. Unless indicated differently the usage of this term does not restrict the policies to physicians only but applies to all practitioners, hospitals, providers, or suppliers eligible to bill the relevant HCPCS/CPT codes pursuant to applicable portions of the Social Security Act (SSA) of 1965, the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), and Medicare rules. In some sections of this Manual, the term “physician” would not include some of these entities because specific rules do not apply to them. For example, Anesthesia Rules and Global Surgery Rules do not apply to hospitals.

2. With few exceptions the payment for a surgical procedure includes payment for dressings, supplies, and local

anesthesia. These items are not separately reportable under their own HCPCS/CPT codes. Wound closures utilizing adhesive strips, topical skin adhesive, or tape alone are not separately reportable. In the absence of an operative procedure, these types of wound closures are included in an E&M service.

3. The vagotomy CPT codes 43635-43641 and 64752-64760 are not separately reportable with esophageal or gastric procedures that include vagotomy as part of the service. For example, the esophagogastrostomy procedure described by CPT code 43320 includes a vagotomy if performed. The vagotomy procedures are mutually exclusive, and only one vagotomy procedure code may be reported at a patient encounter.

4. If closure of an enterostomy or fistula involving the intestine requires resection and anastomosis of a segment of intestine, the resection and anastomosis of the intestine are not separately reportable.

5. If multiple services are utilized to treat hemorrhoids at the same patient encounter, only one HCPCS/CPT code describing the most extensive procedure may be reported. If an abscess is drained during the treatment of hemorrhoids, the incision and drainage is not separately reportable unless the incision and drainage is at a separate site unrelated to the hemorrhoids. In the latter case, the incision and drainage code may be reported appending an anatomic modifier or modifier -59.

6. The *CPT Manual* contains groups of codes describing different approaches or methods to accomplish similar results. These codes are generally mutually exclusive of one another. For example CPT codes 45110-45123 describe different proctectomy procedures and are mutually exclusive of one another. Other examples include groups of codes for colectomies (CPT codes 44140-44160), gastrectomies (CPT codes 43620-43635), and pancreatectomies (CPT codes 48140-48155).

7. An enterostomy closure HCPCS/CPT code should not be reported with a code for creation or revision of a colostomy. Closure of an enterostomy is mutually exclusive with the creation or revision of the colostomy.

8. If an excised section of intestine includes a fistula tract, a fistula closure code should not be reported separately. Closure of the fistula is included in the excision of intestine.

9. The mouth and anus have mucocutaneous margins. Numerous procedures (e.g., biopsy, destruction, excision) have CPT codes that describe the procedure as an integumentary procedure (CPT codes 10000-19999) or as a digestive system procedure (CPT codes 40000-49999). If a procedure is performed on a lesion at or near a mucocutaneous margin, only one CPT code which best describes the procedure may be reported. If the code descriptor of a CPT code from the digestive system (or any other system) includes a tissue transfer service (e.g., flap, graft), the CPT codes for such services (e.g., transfer, graft, flap) from the integumentary system (e.g., CPT codes 14000-15770) should not be reported separately.

10. An open cholecystectomy includes an examination of the abdomen through the abdominal wall incision. If this examination is performed laparoscopically, it is not separately reportable as CPT code 49320 (diagnostic laparoscopy).

11. CPT code 92502 (otolaryngologic examination under general anesthesia) is not separately reportable with any other otolaryngologic procedure performed under general anesthesia.

12. CPT codes 43770-43774 describe laparoscopic gastric restrictive procedures. Only one of these procedure codes may be reported for a single patient encounter. If a patient develops a complication during the postoperative period of the initial procedure requiring return to the operating room for a different laparoscopic gastric restrictive procedure to treat the complication, the second procedure should be reported with modifier -78.

13. With limited exceptions Medicare Anesthesia Rules prevent separate payment for anesthesia for a medical or surgical service when provided by the physician performing the service. The physician should not report CPT codes 00100-01999. Additionally, the physician should not unbundle the anesthesia procedure and report component codes individually. For example, introduction of a needle or intracatheter into a vein (CPT code 36000), venipuncture (CPT code 36410), or drug administration (CPT codes 90760-90775) should not be reported when these services are related to the delivery of an anesthetic agent.

Medicare may allow separate payment for moderate conscious sedation services (CPT codes 99143-99145) when provided by the

same physician performing the medical or surgical procedure except for those procedures listed in Appendix G of the *CPT Manual.*

Under Medicare Global Surgery Rules, drug administration services (CPT codes 90760-90775) are not separately reportable by the physician performing a procedure for drug administration services related to the procedure.

Under the OPPS drug administration services related to operative procedures are included in the associated procedural HCPCS/CPT codes. Examples of such drug administration services include, but are not limited to, anesthesia (local or other), hydration, and medications such as anxiolytics or antibiotics. Providers should not report CPT codes 90760-90775 for these services.

Medicare Global Surgery Rules prevent separate payment for postoperative pain management when provided by the physician performing an operative procedure. CPT codes 36000, 36410, 37202, 62318-62319, 64415-64417, 64450, 64470, 64475, and 90760-90775 describe some services that may be utilized for postoperative pain management. The services described by these codes may be reported by the physician performing the operative procedure only if provided for purposes unrelated to the postoperative pain management, the operative procedure, or anesthesia for the procedure.

If a physician performing an operative procedure provides a drug administration service (CPT codes 90760-90775) for a purpose unrelated to anesthesia, intra-operative care, or post-procedure pain management, the drug administration service (CPT codes 90760-90775) may be reported with an NCCI-associated modifier if performed in a non-facility site of service.

14. The Medicare global surgery package includes insertion of urinary catheters. CPT codes 51701-51703 (insertion of bladder catheters) should not be reported with a procedure with a global period of 000, 010, or 090 days.

15. Repair of a surgical incision (CPT codes 12001-13153) is generally included in the global surgical package. These codes should not be reported separately to describe closure of such surgical incisions. However, there are a few types of procedures defined by the *CPT Manual* where repair codes are separately reportable. NCCI edits do not bundle CPT codes 12001-

13153 into all surgical procedures where closure of the incision is included in the global surgical package, but only into those surgical procedures with identified problems. Physicians must code correctly even in the absence of NCCI edits.

16. Control of bleeding during an operative procedure is an integral component of a surgical procedure and is not separately reportable. Postoperative control of bleeding not requiring return to the operating room is included in the global surgical package and is not separately reportable. However, control of bleeding requiring return to the operating room in the postoperative period is separately reportable utilizing modifier -78.

17. A biopsy performed at the time of another more extensive procedure (e.g., excision, destruction, removal) is separately reportable under specific circumstances.

If the biopsy is performed on a separate lesion, it is separately reportable. This situation may be reported with anatomic modifiers or modifier -59.

If the biopsy is performed on the same lesion on which the more extensive procedure is performed, it is separately reportable only if the biopsy is utilized for immediate pathologic diagnosis prior to the more extensive procedure, and the decision to proceed with the more extensive procedure is based on the result of the pathologic examination. Modifier -58 may be reported to indicate that the biopsy and the more extensive procedure were planned or staged procedures.

If a biopsy is performed and submitted for pathologic evaluation that will be completed after the more extensive procedure is performed, the biopsy is not separately reportable with the more extensive procedure.

18. Fine needle aspiration (FNA) (CPT codes 10021, 10022) should not be reported with another biopsy procedure code for the same lesion unless one specimen is inadequate for diagnosis. For example, an FNA specimen is usually examined for adequacy when the specimen is aspirated. If the specimen is adequate for diagnosis, it is not necessary to obtain an additional biopsy specimen. However, if the specimen is not adequate and another type of biopsy (e.g., needle, open) is subsequently performed at

the same patient encounter, the other biopsy procedure code may also be reported with an NCCI-associated modifier.

19. The NCCI edit with column one CPT code 45385 (Flexible colonoscopy with removal of tumor(s), polyp(s), or lesion(s) by snare technique) and column two CPT code 45380 (Flexible colonoscopy with single or multiple biopsies) is often bypassed by utilizing modifier -59. Use of modifier -59 with the column two CPT code 45380 of this NCCI edit is only appropriate if the two procedures are performed on separate lesions or at separate patient encounters.

20. If the code descriptor of a HCPCS/CPT code includes the phrase, “separate procedure”, the procedure is subject to NCCI edits based on this designation. CMS does not allow separate reporting of a procedure designated as a “separate procedure” when it is performed at the same patient encounter as another procedure in an anatomically related area through the same skin incision, orifice, or surgical approach.

21. Most NCCI edits for codes describing procedures that may be performed on bilateral organs or structures (e.g., arms, eyes, kidneys, lungs) allow use of NCCI-associated modifiers (modifier indicator of “1”) because the two codes of the code pair edit may be reported if the two procedures are performed on contralateral organs or structures. Most of these code pairs should not be reported with NCCI-associated modifiers when the corresponding procedures are performed on the ipsilateral organ or structure unless there is a specific coding rationale to bypass the edit. The existence of the NCCI edit indicates that the two codes generally should not be reported together unless the two corresponding procedures are performed at two separate patient encounters or two separate anatomic sites. However, if the corresponding procedures are performed at the same patient encounter and in contiguous structures, NCCI-associated modifiers should generally not be utilized.