Coding Update: The Charge Description Master

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Nuclear medicine technologists are increasingly being assigned responsibility for various administrative jobs including coding and reimbursement tasks such as maintaining the departmental Charge Description Master (CDM). Keeping the CDM up-to-date is critical. The task of sifting through the plethora of coding systems and payer rules, containing both information and misinformation, in a host of publications and forums can be daunting.

In this issue of *Uptake*, we present some resources that may make the administration and updating of the CDM easier and more accurate for nuclear medicine technologists that are so tasked. Tables 1 & 2 provide a summary of publicly available sources and implementation dates for you to consider as you set your billing and CDM quality control schedule.

Since private third party payers do not generally disclose their information publicly, someone in each facility should be assigned the responsibility of keeping current on updates and changes to policies and codes for each important payer. Naturally, the CDM should be updated whenever the payers make changes, but it should also be updated each time your facility adds new procedures and services.

A sample list of nuclear medicine resources and publications is provided in Table 3, but the list is not all-inclusive. One word of caution, for ANY non-authoritative coding source: these are the interpretations of "experts and consultants." Prior to implementing any policy from a non-authoritative publication it would be wise to find out where the policy originated, and ensure that the policy interpretation did not deviate from the intent of the original authoritative policy. Be careful, misinformation is out there, even from experts.

Table 1: Authoritative Source Summary Table

	HCPCS Level I CPT Codes	HCPCS Level I Modifiers	HCPCS Level II National Codes	HCPCS Level II Modifiers	HCPCS Level III Local Codes
Code Use	Describes procedures or medical service performed.	Modifies the procedure or medical service	Reports supplies, drugs, radiopharmaceuticals, injections, non-physician procedures	Modifies a Level II national code	Reports procedures and supplies excluded from Level II national codes
Format	5-digit numeric	2-digit numeric	5-character alpha-numeric	2-character alpha-numeric	5- character alpha-numeric, W0000 to Z9999
Authoritative Source*	American Medical Association (AMA) www.ama-assn.org	AMA	Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) www.cms.hhs.gov	CMS	CMS's local contractors, Fiscal Intermediary (FI) or Carriers
Frequency of Updates	Annual	Annual	Quarterly	Quarterly	Irregular Intervals
Potential Publication Date	November	November	Quarterly Nov, Feb, May and August	Same as HCPCS Level II	Irregular Intervals
Implementation Date	January 1st each year	January 1st each year	Quarterly, Jan, April, July and October (3 month grace period, usually)	Same as HCPCS Level II	Irregular Intervals
Reference Documents	AMA's CPT Manuel	AMA's CPT Manuel	CMS's local FI or Carrier	CMS's local FI or Carrier	CMS's local FI or Carrier

*Note: CMS may provide guidance in the form of program memoranda and transmittals for the use, coverage and payment polices for any of these codes listed and used in the Medicare and Medicaid Systems.

Table 2: Medicare Outpatient Payment System Rule & Implementation Date Summary

Publication Source	Medicare Payment System	Potential Publication Date	Proposed Implementation Date
Program Memorandum, Technical Correction to 2003 HOPPS/APC rule	HOPPS/APC	Aug. 2003	Oct. 1, 2003
Federal Register, Proposed 2004 RBRVS also referred to as Physician Fee Schedule (PFS)	RBRVS/PFS	July 2003	Jan. 1, 2004
Federal Register, Proposed 2004 HOPPS/APC rule	HOPPS/APC	Aug. 2003	Jan. 1, 2004
Program Memorandum, Technical Correction to 2003 HOPPS/APC rule	HOPPS/APC	Sept. 2003	Oct. 1, 2003
Federal Register, RBRVS/PFS 2004 Final Rule	RBRVS/PFS	Nov. 2003	Jan. 1, 2004
Federal Register, HOPPS/APC 2004 Final Rule	HOPPS/APC	Nov. 2003	Jan. 1, 2004

Table 3: Some Nuclear Medicine (NON-Authoritative) Coding Resources

Organizations/Web Sites	Subscriptions/Publications
Society of Nuclear Medicine (www.snm.org) American College of Radiology (http://www.acr.org/) American Society of Nuclear Cardiology (www.asnc.org) American College of Cardiology (www.acc.org) American Healthcare Radiology Administrators (www.ahraonline.com) Radiology Business Managers Association (www.rbma.com) American College of Nuclear Physicians (www.acnponline.org)	Atlantic Information Services, Inc. (www.AISHealth.com) Decision Health (www.decisionhealth.com) ACR Radiology Coding Source™ Medlearn Publications (www.medlearn.com) St. Anthony Publications (www.ingenionline.com, 800-INGENIX)