

Documentation and Coding Tips

Cancer Coding: Active vs History Of

Clear provider documentation is essential for accurate and complete coding of cancer.

Active cancer is when:

- The patient is actively and currently being treated and managed for cancer with chemotherapy or radiation.
- The patient has refused therapeutic treatment for cancer or is on watchful waiting.

History of cancer is when:

- The cancer was successfully treated, excised or eradicated and no further treatment is needed.
- The patient had cancer and is coming back for surveillance of recurrence.

Adjuvant hormonal therapy for breast or prostate cancer can be coded as active or history of if:

- The patient is taking medication to treat the cancer (even after it's been removed), document this as active cancer treatment and code as active cancer.
- The patient is taking medication for prophylactic purposes to ensure the treated cancer does not come back, document this as prophylactic treatment and code as history of.

Document the following for accurate and specific assignment of the correct ICD.10 code(s):

- **Type of cancer:**
 - Document the primary malignancy and all secondary metastases.
 - Use the words "to" and "from" to clarify the origin of the cancer.
- **Location of cancer:**
 - Document the specific body part or tissue type.
 - Include laterality, if applicable.
- **Status of cancer:**
 - Document if the cancer is currently active, historical, in remission, not achieved remission or is recurrent.
- **Current treatment plan for cancer:**
 - Document all treatment plans (surgery, chemotherapy, radiation, adjuvant hormonal therapy, prophylactic treatment, patient refusal of treatment, watchful waiting) and any complications.

Documentation and Coding Examples:

Active cancer: Female patient with ongoing chemotherapy after right mastectomy for breast cancer.

Assign code: C50.911 Malignant neoplasm of unspecified site of right female breast; Z90.11 Acquired absence of right breast and nipple

Even though the breast has been removed, the breast cancer is still being treated with chemotherapy and still coded as active cancer rather than personal history.

History of cancer: Female patient with metastatic bone cancer originating from breast cancer that was eradicated 3 years ago, and is no longer receiving treatment, is seen today for ongoing radiation treatment for bone cancer.

Assign code: C79.51 Secondary malignant neoplasm of bone; Z85.3 Personal history of malignant neoplasm of breast.

Where the breast cancer was eradicated 3 years ago, you would code the active metastatic bone cancer and code the breast cancer as history of.