

Documentation and Coding Tips

Fractures-Traumatic Initial, Subsequent and Sequela Encounters

We all know fracture coding can be a challenge. Provider documentation determines all aspects of the fracture puzzle and how the pieces fit together. Documenting key details in progress notes and knowing how to delineate initial, subsequent and sequela encounter visits is crucial for proper code selection.

Note: Fractures in patients with known osteoporosis whose injury would not usually break a normal, healthy bone should not be classified with a traumatic injury code, but with a combination code from category M80 Osteoporosis with current pathological fracture.

When documenting Traumatic Fractures, specify the following details:

- **Date and cause**
- **Site, laterality and specific bone fractured:** Displaced fracture of medial phalanx or right index finger
- **Type:** Comminuted, greenstick, oblique, physeal, segmental, spiral, transverse
 - Open versus closed (if not indicated, fractures are coded as closed)
 - Displaced versus non-displaced (if not indicated, fractures are coded as displaced)
- **Episode of care:** (7th character assignment indicates if patient is receiving initial or subsequent treatment)
 - **Initial** is when the patient is receiving active treatment (Initial is also assigned for the patient who delayed seeking treatment)
 - Examples: Closed treatment, surgical treatment, ED visit for acute fracture treatment, evaluation and treatment by new provider (not in healing stage)
 - A-Initial encounter for closed fracture
 - B-Initial encounter for open fracture type I or II
 - C-Initial encounter for open fracture type IIIA, IIIB, or IIIC
 - **Subsequent** is after the patient has completed active treatment and is receiving routine care during the healing or recovery phase
 - Examples: Cast change/removal, x-rays for evaluating healing status, removal of external or internal fixation device, medication adjustment and aftercare follow-up visits following initial fracture treatment
 - D-Subsequent encounter for closed fracture with routine healing
 - E-Subsequent encounter for open fracture type I or II with routine with routine healing
 - F-Subsequent encounter for open fracture type IIIA, IIIB, or IIIC with routine healing
 - G-Subsequent encounter for closed fracture with delayed healing
 - H-Subsequent encounter for open fracture type I or II with delayed healing
 - J-Subsequent encounter for open type IIIA, IIIB, or IIIC with delayed healing
 - K-Subsequent encounter for closed fracture with nonunion
 - M-Subsequent encounter for open fracture type I or II with nonunion
 - N-Subsequent encounter for open fracture type IIIA, IIIB, or IIIC with nonunion
 - P-Subsequent encounter for closed fracture with malunion
 - Q-Subsequent encounter for open fracture type I or II with malunion
 - R-Subsequent encounter for open fracture type IIIA, IIIB or IIIC with malunion
 - **Sequela-S** is assigned when there are complications or late effects that arise as a direct result of the fracture
- **Associated complications/injuries:** Blood vessels, infection, nerves, spinal cord injuries
- **Diagnostic tools/treatment:** CT scan, DEXA, MRI, x-ray, physical therapy, restricted activity, rest, medications prescribed

Most Common Fracture Questions and Answers

Active treatment provided by different physicians-Initial Example:

Question: Patient is seen by a physician for surgical treatment of a closed fracture. The same patient is seen by a different physician who continues to provide ongoing active treatment. Are both encounters assigned the 7th character “A” for initial encounter?

Answer: Yes, both encounters are assigned the 7th character “A, initial encounter” since both encounters provided active treatment. An initial encounter character may be used each time the patient is seen by a different provider over the course of the active treatment. The code assignment is not limited to the patient's initial medical evaluation.

Fracture follow-up provided by a new provider-Subsequent Example:

Question: A patient with a healed fracture, who is status post fracture treatment four months ago, is seen by a new provider for the first time for a follow-up visit. Is this visit to the new provider assigned the 7th character “A” for initial encounter?

Answer: Since the patient's fracture is healed and no longer receiving active treatment, you would assign the appropriate 7th character for “subsequent encounter”.

Degenerative process in ankle-Sequela Example:

Question: Patient fell and broke his right ankle several years ago. He has developed a degenerative process in this same ankle and his primary care provider indicated it was related to his previous injury. Would this be coded as initial treatment?

Answer: No, in this scenario, the patient is having a residual effect after the acute phase of an injury has terminated. You would use the 7th character S for sequela.