

# Medicare Risk Adjustment Coding Focus

## Atrial fibrillation

Atrial fibrillation, sometimes referred to as AFib or AF, is a common form of heart arrhythmia that can occur in brief episodes or as a permanent condition. When atrial fibrillation occurs, the upper chambers of the heart, known as the atria, beat in an irregular pattern, which can increase the risk of heart-related complications such as heart failure, stroke and blood clots.

There are approximately 2.7 million Americans living with atrial fibrillation and 15% of individuals who have suffered a stroke have atrial fibrillation.<sup>1</sup>

### Signs and symptoms

Often people with AFib will have no signs or symptoms and may not know that they have it. AFib symptoms can vary in severity from mild to debilitating. The most common symptoms are the feeling of a rapid heartbeat and fluttering in the chest with palpitations. Other symptoms are shortness of breath, weakness, fatigue, light-headedness and chest pain. During early onset, symptoms may be mild and are often short-lived as normal heart rhythm is restored.<sup>4</sup>

There are three categories of atrial fibrillation: paroxysmal, persistent and permanent. Paroxysmal, meaning occasional AFib is characterized by symptoms that come and go, lasting from a few minutes to hours before stopping on its own. Persistent chronic AFib occurs when the heart rhythm does not go back to normal on its own and requires chemical or electrical cardioversion to resolve symptoms. With permanent AFib, the abnormal heart rhythm cannot be restored without medication to control the heart rate.<sup>2</sup>

### Risk factors

There is no one single cause of atrial fibrillation as it can be associated with many conditions.<sup>2</sup> However, factors such as age, high blood pressure, obesity, heart disease and ethnicity may increase the risk for developing AFib.<sup>1</sup>

### Treatment

Atrial fibrillation is not a life-threatening condition, but it may be serious enough to require emergency treatment. The goals for treating atrial fibrillation are to control the heart rate, prevent blood clots and to decrease the risk of strokes.<sup>4</sup> Treatments can include:

- Rate-control medications
- Blood-thinning medications
- Catheter ablation
- Electrical conversion
- Lifestyle changes

### Coding guidance

Official coding guidelines for atrial fibrillation are available in Chapter 9 of the ICD-10-CM codebook.<sup>3</sup> In order to assign the most appropriate ICD-10 code for category I48 (Atrial Fibrillation and Flutter), documentation should specify whether AFib is paroxysmal, persistent, or chronic with details regarding its current status and any related treatments.

| Atrial Fibrillation and Flutter (HCC 96) |                                 |
|--|---------------------------------|
| I48.0                                    | Paroxysmal atrial fibrillation  |
| I48.1*                                   | Persistent atrial fibrillation  |
| I48.2*                                   | Chronic atrial fibrillation     |
| I48.3                                    | Typical atrial flutter          |
| I48.4                                    | Atypical atrial flutter         |
| I48.91                                   | Unspecified atrial fibrillation |
| I48.92                                   | Unspecified atrial flutter      |
| *Additional characters required          |                                 |

### Resources

- 1 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2017). *Atrial Fibrillation Fact Sheet*. Accessed March 13, 2018 from <https://www.cdc.gov>
- 2 Mayo Clinic. (2018). *Atrial Fibrillation*. Accessed March 13, 2018 from <https://www.mayoclinic.org>
- 3 Schmidt, A. & Patterson, L. (2018). *ICD-10-CM Expert for Physicians*. Optum Insight Inc.
- 4 Shiel Jr, W. (2018). *Atrial Fibrillation*. Accessed March 12, 2018 from <https://www.medicinenet.com/script/main/hp.asp>

Reference the ICD-10-CM Codebook, CMS-HCC Risk Adjustment Model(s) and AHA Coding Clinic for complete code sets and official coding guidance.