

Medicare Risk Adjustment Coding Focus

Deep vein thrombosis

Deep vein thrombosis (DVT) is a condition that occurs when a blood clot (i.e., thrombus) forms within the deep veins of the body, typically in the legs.¹ It is a very serious condition as the blood clot can break up and travel through the bloodstream to the lungs, causing pulmonary embolism (PE). When blood flow to the lungs is blocked due to PE, the decrease in blood oxygen levels can potentially cause organ damage.

Symptoms

The most common symptom of DVT is swelling in the affected leg, as well as pain in the calf area, which has been described as soreness or cramping. Bilateral DVT is rare and therefore, swelling in both legs is, most of the time, due to a different cause. DVT can also occur without any symptoms at all.

PE is a concerning complication of DVT, as it can be fatal. Warning signs of PE include:²

- Sudden onset of shortness of breath
- Chest pain, exacerbated by taking deep breaths
- Fainting
- Lightheadedness
- Hemoptysis (i.e., coughing up blood)

Treatment

There are many different treatment options for DVT. Anticoagulants, commonly known as blood thinners, are used to decrease the blood's ability to clot. Anticoagulants keep clots from getting larger and helps prevent new clots from forming.

More serious clots may require the use of clot-busting drugs, known as thrombolytics. These medications are administered through the intravenous route. As they can cause serious bleeding conditions, they are only administered in life-threatening situations in the hospital. Filters can be used when there is a contraindication to using anticoagulants, usually due to increased risk of bleeding.

Filters are surgically implanted in the inferior vena cava and they are designed to catch loose clots before they reach the lungs. Compression stockings are used to prevent pooling of blood in the veins of the legs and this reduces the chance of blood clot development.

Coding guidance

Coders cannot make assumptions about the acuity of a patient's condition; it is essential that the medical record accurately depict if DVT is an acute, chronic, or historical condition. A DVT is considered acute at the time of onset or initial diagnosis, requiring the patient to start anticoagulation therapy. Chronic DVT, as defined by AHA Coding Clinic, is a thrombus that is one month to several months old and usually involves symptoms, such as chronic swelling, ulceration, cellulitis, or other complication."

According to American Hospital Association Coding Clinic, "Query the physician for clarification whether the Coumadin is being given prophylactically to prevent recurrence of DVT or as treatment for chronic DVT. The patient may not have active disease but is being managed because of susceptibility for recurrence. Unfortunately, "history" as used in physician documentation can be a vague term that can have different meanings. According to the Official Guidelines for Coding and Reporting, "personal history codes explain a patient's past medical condition that no longer exists and is not receiving any treatment, but that has the potential for recurrence, and therefore may require monitoring."

Proper documentation should specify not only the acuity and severity of DVT, but also the site including laterality. ICD-10-CM Category I82 includes specific codes that are dependent upon this level of specificity in the documentation.³

Deep vein thrombosis	
I82.4	*Acute embolism and thrombosis of deep veins of lower extremity
I82.5	*Chronic embolism and thrombosis of deep veins of lower extremity
Z86.718	Personal history of other venous thrombosis and embolism
*Additional characters required	

Resources

- 1 Mayo Clinic website, Deep vein thrombosis (accessed August 2020): <https://www.mayoclinic.org>
- 2 Medline Plus website, Pulmonary Embolism (accessed August 2020): <https://medlineplus.gov/pulmonaryembolism.html>
- 3 AHA Coding Clinic, Q1, 2011, History of DVT on Coumadin Therapy.

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