

Medicare Risk Adjustment Coding Focus

Sick Sinus Syndrome

Overview

Sick sinus syndrome is a group of heart rhythm issues in which the sino-atrial (SA) node, the heart's natural pacemaker, does not function correctly. The SA node produces electrical impulses that start each beat of the heart. In some patients, the SA node does not send the right signals to start a normal heartbeat or it disrupts the electrical impulses that prevent them from getting to the entire heart.¹

When the SA node (also known as the sinus node) is not functioning correctly, it can cause the heart rhythm to be too slow (bradycardia), too fast (tachycardia), result in long pauses, or any other combination of rhythm problems.

Signs and symptoms

Sick sinus syndrome often manifests with little to no symptoms. In some cases, when symptoms arise, they may come and go. These symptoms can include heart palpitations, fatigue, shortness of breath, fainting, chest pains and confusion.

Risk factors

Sick sinus syndrome is more commonly diagnosed in individuals aged 65 and older. However, it can occur at any age, including infancy.² Sinus node misfiring may be due to scarring or damage to the heart's electrical system. There are a variety of heart conditions and other disorders, such as muscular dystrophy, thyroid disease, sleep apnea, prior heart attack and atrial fibrillation, that can be risk factors in causing damage to the SA node.

Treatment

Treatment for sick sinus syndrome focuses on the specific symptoms the patient may possess. If the patient is not experiencing bothersome symptoms, their physician may only recommend regularly scheduled follow-up visits and possibly medication. For patients who experience chronic

and constant episodes of symptoms, a pacemaker is typically implanted.

Anti-arrhythmia medications may be prescribed to prevent heart rhythms that are too fast, even for those with implanted pacemakers. Atrioventricular (AV) node ablation procedures may be performed to control rapid heart rhythms for patients with pacemakers as well. The AV node ablation procedure destroys the AV node between the atria and the ventricles. Radiofrequency ablation of atrial fibrillation is similar to the AV node ablation. That procedure, however, destroys the tissue that causes atrial fibrillation.²

Coding guidance

Coding advice for sick sinus syndrome controlled with an implanted cardiac device (such as a pacemaker) is available from the American Hospital Association (AHA) Coding Clinic, which notes that although sick sinus syndrome may be controlled with a pacemaker, the condition itself is still considered to be present and reportable as a chronic condition. It would be appropriate to assign a code for sick sinus syndrome and the presence of a cardiac pacemaker when both are documented and supported in the medical record. Documentation should clearly indicate the presence of both and the impact on patient care in order to utilize these codes.³

Sick sinus syndrome (HCC 96)

I49.5 — sick sinus syndrome

Z95.0 (no HCC) — presence of cardiac pacemaker

Resources

- 1 Sick sinus syndrome — Genetics Home Reference — NIH. (n.d.). Retrieved November 26, 2019, from ghr.nlm.nih.gov
- 2 Sick sinus syndrome. Retrieved November 26, 2019 from mayoclinic.org
- 3 AHA Coding Clinic for ICD-10-CM and ICD-10-PCS, Volume 6, Number 1, Quarter 1, 2019, pg. 33

This publication contains proprietary information. This material is for informational purposes only and is not guaranteed to be without defect. Please reference the current version(s) of the *ICD-10-CM* codebook, *CMS-HCC Risk Adjustment Model* and *AHA Coding Clinic* for complete code sets and official coding guidance. Redistribution or other use is strictly forbidden.