

# Medicare Risk Adjustment Coding Focus

## Compression fractures

### Overview

According to the American Association of Neurological Surgeons, the most common type of fracture in patients with osteoporosis is a vertebral compression fracture (VCF), which affects about 750,000 people annually.<sup>1</sup> A VCF occurs when there is a collapse of the vertebral body in the spine. While the most common cause of VCF is osteoporosis, these fractures can also be caused by trauma or metastatic tumors.

### Fracture coding complexity

Coding for fractures is complex as there are different types of fractures, multiple anatomical locations, and various other factors that influence correct code assignment. In fact, there are over 17,000 ICD-10-CM codes related to fractures.

Medical record documentation is essential to properly code for fractures. It is important to know what caused the fracture in order to select a code from the correct category. Fracture types include:<sup>2</sup>

- Traumatic fractures – typically due to an accident or injury
- Stress fractures – caused by repetitive motion and overuse
- Pathological fractures – caused by an underlying disease, weakening bone

Once the cause is identified, the anatomical site of the bone will further narrow down the code assignment. For compression fractures, the most common site is the vertebrae, usually in the thoracic region. These fractures may also be documented as collapsed vertebrae, or as wedging of the vertebrae.

In ICD-10-CM, codes for compression and pathologic fractures of the spine (not due to trauma) are located in Chapter 13, Diseases of the Musculoskeletal System and Connective Tissue. Category M48.5-, Collapsed vertebra, not elsewhere classifiable is used for vertebrae fracture where no cause is listed.<sup>3</sup> Category M80, Osteoporosis with current pathological fracture should be used when a patient with known osteoporosis suffers a fracture, even if

the patient had a minor fall or trauma that would not normally break a healthy bone. The site of the fracture is identified with the codes under M80.

### Greater specificity in ICD-10-CM

ICD-10-CM adds greater specificity by including additional details such as laterality, episode of care information, whether the fracture was open or closed and status of healing.

Episode of care options include initial encounter, subsequent encounter, or sequela. The initial encounter refers to the first encounter in which the patient is being evaluated for the fracture and is receiving active treatment. Subsequent encounters occur after the patient has received active treatment and is receiving routine follow-up care during the recovery phase.

Sequelae refer to conditions and complications that occur as a direct result of an injury and require ongoing care.

The 7th character provides information about how the fracture is healing. There are indicators for open or closed fracture, routine or delayed healing, and non-union or mal-union of the bone. Provider documentation must include this detail in order to properly code to the highest degree of specificity.

Compression fractures	
<b>M48.5</b>	*Collapsed vertebra, not elsewhere classified
<b>M80</b>	*Osteoporosis with current pathological fracture
<b>*Additional characters required</b>	

### Resources

- 1 The American Association of Neurological Surgeons website (accessed August 2020): <https://www.aans.org>
- 2 WebMD website, *Understanding Bone Fractures—the Basics* (accessed August 2020): <https://www.webmd.com>
- 3 Optum 360° (2019), *ICD-10- CM Expert for Physicians*, The complete official code.

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