



Tools of the Trade

A COMPILATION OF COMPLIANCE RESOURCES

By Melody W. Mulaik

The number of books, online programs, and other tools to assist and support coding efforts can be overwhelming. The following are some suggestions to assist you in deciding what to purchase for your office, staff, and clients. The majority of the listed resources may be available from multiple publishers or re-sellers. Where you purchase is not as much a concern as what you purchase.

Authoritative coding guidance may be obtained from:

- **The American Medical Association (AMA):** The AMA holds the copyright to CPT, and the association's guidance regarding use of its codes is considered to be authoritative.
- **Insurance payers:** These entities pay benefits for their insured population, and their guidance on coding and billing is considered to be authoritative.

Opinions on code assignment may be obtained from specialty societies, other medical entities, and consultants. When making a determination regarding coding compliance, it is essential to consider all information, evaluate its source, and apply the rule of common sense to the specific medical services to be coded.

Must Haves

Every billing office must have the following regardless of how much coding the organization performs:

- **CPT Manual.** Official procedure code listing for the year. The manual content is created and owned by the American Medical Association (AMA) but made available from several sources and in many versions. Acquire a useable version that is of benefit to your employees. Some organizations have published derivative works that are actually more confusing than helpful. A good "Professional Edition" is usually sufficient. Purchase one per coder and at least one per department that needs to reference the material.
- **HCPCS Manual.** The Healthcare Common Procedure Coding System (HCPCS) created by the Centers of Medicare and Medicaid (CMS) to provide codes for specific medical services and supplies. Healthcare delivery organizations, including physicians, must employ these codes when documenting Medicare related supplies/services. An increasing number of private payers also accept or require Level II codes in order to provide reimbursements for these types of expenses.
- **ICD-9-CM Manual.** Official diagnosis code listing for the

year. It's available from numerous publishers without much variation; however, some versions are easier to work with than others. Get input from your staff before purchasing.

- **CPT Assistant.** An authoritative monthly publication providing valuable information from the AMA regarding the rationale behind procedure-code creation and proper utilization. Coding scenarios and questions posed to the AMA are also included. Information contained in this publication is referenced in the *CPT Manual*.
- **Local Coverage Determinations (LCDs).** Obtain copies of all available LCDs that apply to services that you bill. All LCDs are available on the CMS website as well as directly from the Medicare contractor's website. The majority of Medicare contractors have email notification for changes, updates, etc. to existing policies. Sign up for free update services.

Other Recommended Resources

- **Specialty Societies.** Most specialty societies publish coding guidance. It's important to review the information from the society to determine if you agree, and if so, why or why not, then test it against authoritative sources to ensure accuracy and compliance. Most societies do an excellent job of working with the AMA to ensure compliant coding practices and recommendations.
- **Professional Associations.** Some specialties have professional organizations for business management and other non-physician personnel. For those that do, many times these organizations have great resources that are of value. Get connected with specialty organizations and see what resources might be of interest for you.
- **Private Publications.** Do your research before purchasing a private product. Quality varies. Is the company reputable? How long has it been in business? Where does it get its information? Does it have a money-back guarantee? You want a resource that will give you what you need quickly and with accuracy.

Whether you purchase hard or soft-copy resources, it is important to ensure that you acquire the *right* resources to properly equip your staff for success. ▲

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