CPC STUDY MATERIALS

Top 10 ICD-10-CM Coding Guidelines Every CPC Student Must Know

Student Study Guide | Instructor: Corrina R. Lynch

1. Code to highest specificity

Use the most specific code supported by the record, including required laterality and characters.

Example: Type 2 diabetes with hyperglycemia: E11.65, not E11.9.

2. First-listed diagnosis (outpatient)

Report the diagnosis, condition, problem, or other reason chiefly responsible for the services provided.

Example: Office visit specifically for management of hypertension: I10 is first-listed when supported.

3. Principal diagnosis (inpatient)

After study, identify the condition chiefly responsible for occasioning admission to the hospital.

Example: Patient admitted for pneumonia, confirmed after study: pneumonia may be principal.

4. Signs and symptoms

Code signs or symptoms when no definitive diagnosis is established; do not separately report integral symptoms unless instructed.

Example: Abdominal pain without a confirmed cause: report the documented site-specific pain code.

5. Combination codes

Use a combination code when it fully describes the condition(s); add other codes when instructions require them.

Example: Type 2 diabetes with CKD: E11.22 plus an additional N18.- code identifying CKD stage.

6. Acute and chronic conditions

When both forms are documented, separate codes exist, and no contrary instruction applies, report both with acute sequenced first.

Example: Acute and chronic sinusitis: use the supported acute and chronic sinusitis codes.

7. Excludes1 versus Excludes2

Excludes1 generally means NOT CODED HERE (with a limited unrelated-condition exception); Excludes2 means the excluded condition is not included in the code, but both may coexist.

Example: Read the actual Tabular List note before deciding whether two codes can be assigned.

8. Code first / Use additional code

Follow sequencing and additional-code instructions in the Tabular List.

Example: For diabetic CKD, follow E11.22 and N18.- instructions; check the full record for sequencing.

9. Uncertain diagnoses

Outpatient: do not code probable, suspected, or rule-out diagnoses as established. Inpatient discharge rules differ.

Example: Outpatient “rule out pneumonia” with cough: code the confirmed symptom(s), not pneumonia.

10. Laterality and seventh characters

Capture right, left, bilateral where available; assign any required seventh character for the code category.

Example: Right knee pain: M25.561. Injury codes may require a seventh character.

Study reminder

Always verify codes in the current fiscal-year ICD-10-CM Alphabetic Index and Tabular List, including chapter-specific guidance and instructional notes. This guide is a study aid, not a substitute for the official guidelines.