

**Pocket
Coding
Adviser**



**Consultation or New Patient?
Remember the Three R's**

CPT and CMS have recently revised and clarified guidelines for reporting consultation services. Still, many physicians remain unclear about when to report a consultation versus a new patient visit.

While it's true that many of the work components involved in consultations and new patient visits are the same, the higher reimbursement for consultations takes into account the work involved in the writing of a consultation report.

Remember that, for purposes of coding and billing, the terms "referral" and "consultation" are not interchangeable. A **consultation** is the rendering of an opinion or advice; a **referral** is a transfer of care.

AMA's CPT defines "consultation" as a service provided by a physician whose opinion or advice is requested by another physician or other appropriate source. The consultation request must be documented by both parties in the patient's medical records. The consultant's findings and opinion/advice must be communicated by written report to the requesting physician or NPP.

TIP

To help you determine if a service qualifies as a consultation, simply remember the three "R's":
Rquest, **R**ender, and **R**eport

- **Request:** There must be a request for a consultation either in writing or verbally. Both the request and the reason for the consult must be documented in the medical record.
- **Render:** All 3 of the key E/M elements (History, Exam, MDM) are required during the encounter in order to report consultation codes. A consultant may initiate diagnostic and/or treatment services during or subsequent to the initial consultation. In other words, you are a consultant until the patient's care for the condition has been transferred to you.
- **Report:** A written report must be issued to the requesting provider, and a copy maintained in the consultant's medical records.

For 2007, CPT offers two categories of consultation codes. Either may be used for new or established patients:

- Office/Outpatient Consultations (99241-99245)
- Inpatient Consultations (99251-99255)

For documentation tips and physician guidelines on the use of these codes visit the Doctors Digest Website.

Log on to www.doctorsdigest.net for more coding tips for physicians.



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