

**It's a Matter of Time: Billing
for Prolonged Services**

CPT has identified "typical face-to-face" times for outpatient and inpatient evaluation and management (E/M) codes. But what happens when the time spent with a patient exceeds the typical times?

Consider this scenario:

A patient comes into the office with a specific complaint, which you address with a problem-focused exam and straightforward medical decision making. You then spend 60 minutes counseling the patient, and reviewing problems, medication adjustments, and treatment options. Your documentation supports a 99212 visit, which has a typical face-to-face time of 10 minutes—but you spent a total of 70 minutes with the patient.

CPT specifies that when counseling and/or coordination of care comprises more than 50 percent of the encounter, then time may be used as the controlling factor in selection of the E/M code. But even a Level V (99215) visit has a typical face-to-face time of just 40 minutes. Your option in the above scenario would be to report a prolonged services code in addition to the base visit, 99212.

Prolonged services codes (99354-99547) are reported *in addition* to E/M services at any level. Codes 99354 (outpatient) or 99356 (inpatient) are used for the first 30-to-60 minutes of prolonged service; 99355 (outpatient) or 99357 (inpatient) is used for each additional 15-to-30 minutes.

TIPS

- These codes should be used only when the total duration of all direct face-to-face care by the physician (including the visit) exceeds the threshold time for the E/M service by at least 30 minutes.
- Time need not be continuous, but it must be face-to-face. Patient time spent with office staff or unaccompanied by the physician cannot be included when calculating prolonged services.
- Clinical notes should reflect the exact amount of time spent by the physician, and the reason for the extra time should be stated.
- Use the following for reporting prolonged physician services in an office/outpatient setting:

Total Duration	Codes
Less than 30 minutes	included in E/M
30 to 74 minutes	99354
75 to 104 minutes	99354 and 99355 x 1
105 to 134 minutes	99354 and 99355 x 2



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