Cardiology

Cardiology focuses on diagnosing and treating disorders of the heart and the circulatory system. As you’ll learn in this lesson, the cardiovascular system is quite complex, and its various functions play a critical role in a patient’s overall health. Cardiology therefore includes a broad range of diagnostic and procedural services, and coders are encouraged to pay careful attention to the subtle distinctions between various diagnoses and procedures. Because research teams across the globe are constantly producing new tools for diagnosing and treating cardiovascular disorders, it’s equally important for coders to stay on top of all changes relating to cardiology coding procedures.

OBJECTIVES

When you complete this lesson, you’ll be able to

■ Identify major diagnoses and procedures in the Cardiovascular section

■ Discuss special coding issues for cardiovascular procedures found in the Surgery section

■ Discuss special coding issues for cardiovascular procedures found in the Medicine section

■ Discuss special coding issues for cardiovascular procedures found in the Radiology section

ASSIGNMENT 9

Read through the following material in your study guide. After you’ve read the study guide commentary, read pages 615–659 of your textbook Step-By-Step Medical Coding.

To understand the various services and procedures associated with cardiology, it’s important to know how the cardiovascular system functions. The principal element of the cardiovascular system is the heart, which pumps blood through every organ of the body. Blood transfers oxygen and nutrients to organ tissues and carries away waste products left behind by various
organ processes. Disruption or irregularity in the pumping action of the heart can adversely affect the function of the body’s other organs and may even result in organ failure.

The heart consists of four chambers. The right and left ventricles are muscular chambers designed to push blood out of the heart. The right ventricle propels blood to the lungs, while the left ventricle moves blood to all other organs. The right and left atria store blood returning through the network of veins and blood vessels to the heart. When the heart is operating smoothly, the atria open at exactly the right moment to empty their contents into the right and left ventricles.

To ensure that blood moves in the right direction through the four chambers of the heart, four heart valves—the tricuspid, pulmonic, mitral, and aortic valves—open and close at precise intervals.

The heart muscle never stops working and therefore requires a constant supply of oxygenated blood. This requirement is supplied by three major coronary arteries attached to the aorta: the right coronary artery (RCA) and two left arteries, the left anterior descending artery (LAD) and the circumflex artery. Blockage, or occlusion, in any of these coronary arteries can seriously damage the heart muscle. Commonly referred to as a heart attack, damage stemming from coronary artery blockage is medically known as a myocardial infarction.

The various processes of the heart are controlled by an electrical signal generated in the upper part of the right atrium. The strength and regularity of this signal can be measured by placing electrodes on the skin of the chest. Known as an electrocardiogram, this method of recording the heart’s electrical activity is a standard cardiology service. Another common procedure, known as echocardiography, uses ultrasound waves to evaluate the heart’s structure and the direction and flow of blood through the heart muscle.

Cardiovascular system procedure codes form a subsection of the Surgery section of the CPT manual. The cardiovascular subsection is divided into two subheadings based on anatomical site: Heart/Pericardium and Arteries/Veins. The codes in each of these subheadings are organized by procedure. In the
ICD-9-CM manual, diagnostic codes are organized by condition, while most procedures are grouped in the Operations on the Cardiovascular System section of the Index of Procedures.

Cardiology coding is difficult for most people. However, there are some who take to it quickly—you never know where you’ll fall! Good cardiology coders are hard to come by, so if you find you’re excelling in this chapter, it might be worth it to look for a job where you’ll find a good mentor. Certified cardiology coders never have a shortage of work!

**After you’ve finished Lesson 5, take the time to review all the study assignments. Then, proceed to your examination before moving on to Lesson 6.**