Managing Mental Health Medical Codes

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Abstract

When developing or rebutting a life care plan or writing a bill review, life care planners must be aware of medical billing codes and corresponding definitions that can be utilized specific to the diagnosis and treatment of mental health. This article will review the Current Procedural Terminology (CPT) codes as well as provide resources for several national associations applicable to the delivery of mental health care.

Historically, the American Medical Association (AMA) created the Current Procedural Terminology (CPT) coding system in 1966 as a method of standardizing reporting needed for reimbursement of services performed by healthcare providers (AAPC; CPT). Evaluation and management (E/M) codes are used by physicians, nurse practitioners and physician assistants and are formatted based on 1) the numeric code, 2) the place where and or the type of service provided (inpatient or outpatient), 3) the actual service provided based on the code definition, and 4) the time spent as specified in the code definition. E/M codes are found CPT 99202 – 99499; code 99211 and 99281 are exceptions as those codes may be used with other clinicians (CPT® Evaluation and Management (E/M) Code and Guidelines Changes).

Time components stated in E/M codes include both face-to-face time spent with the patient and the family or caregiver as well as non- face-to-face activities including locating medical records and test results, communicating with additional members of the care team and coordinating care (Sophocles, A. 2003). Time based codes used for various therapies indicate that the time spent directly with the patient, typically occurring in 15 minute increments, (Tornese, N. 2023), four units totals one hour of therapy, for example. Reviewing the definition of individual CPT codes will assist in determining if the code is

time or unit based. Untimed or unit-based codes indicate the provision of a service regardless of the time spent, often once per day (Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services). Mental health related timed codes are included in both E/M and therapeutic modalities.

Mental Health Defined

The World Health Organization defines mental health as a "state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community." The WHO further described mental health not as the absence of diagnoses rather a "complex continuum" of symptoms that vary experientially and in the level of impact from person to person (WHO, 2022).

Mental health and physical injury/chronic illness have a co-associated relationship. Among the causes of depression, anxiety and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder are physical injury and chronic illness. Similarly, the ability to recover from injury or illness in the presence of an existing mental health issue is negatively impacted (Altius Group, 2023).

Statistically, among adults living in the United States, 1 in 5 live with a mental illness. For teens ages 13 – 18 years old, more than 1 in 5 currently have or will develop "a seriously debilitating mental illness (US Department of Health, 2023)."

Mental Health Care

Given the correlation between mental health, physical injury, and chronic illness, it is important to consider treatment when developing a life care plan.

Mental health recommendations may include care by:

1. Neurologists
2. Psychiatrists
3. Neuropsychologists
4. Psychologists
5. Behavior Health professionals
6. Cognitive therapists

The types of care may include:

1. Assessments
2. Therapy
3. Treatment

Mental Health Care Team; Therapy Codes & Associations

Neurology

Neurologists are medical doctors who specialize in treating diseases of the nervous system including the brain and spinal cord as well as the peripheral nerves and muscles.

a. Associations:

i. American Academy of Neurology:
   https://www.aan.com

ii. American Neurological Association:
   https://myana.org/

iii. American Association of Neurological Surgeons:
   https://www.aans.org

iv. Clinical Neurological Society of America:
   https://www.neuroamerica.org

v. American Association of Neuroscience Nurses:
   https://aann.org

vi. Child Neurology Society:
   https://www.childneurologysociety.org

b. Coding:

i. Neurologists may use Evaluation and Management (E/M) codes for billing (CPT 99202 – 99499). Since the start of the global pandemic, many people have opted for services that do not require an in-office visit. In these instances, neurologists use codes 99441 - 99443). The codes are time-based. These codes are not specific to mental health.

ii. Code 99484 allows the neurologist the opportunity to capture charges when providing case management specific for behavioral health conditions; limited to 20 minutes per month.

Psychiatry

1. Psychiatrists are medical doctors specializing in the mental health field.

a. Associations:

i. American Psychiatric Association:
   https://www.psychiatry.org

ii. American Psychiatric Association Foundation:
   https://www.apafdn.org

iii. American Psychiatric Nurses Association:
   https://www.apna.org

b. Coding:

i. Intake: there are two primary CPT codes for a psychiatric evaluation:

ii. 90791: Psychiatric Diagnostic Evaluation. This code can be used when billing an evaluation performed by psychiatry, psychology, licensed professional counselors, licensed marriage and family therapists, and licensed clinical social workers and others.

ii. 90792: Psychiatric Diagnostic Evaluation with medical services. With the addition of medical services included in the evaluation, this code is valid only for those with medical licensure (MD/DO) and prescriptive authorization (i.e.: Nurse practitioner or Physician's Assistant).

iii. As physicians, psychiatrists use E/M codes for billing (CPT 99202 – 99499); time-based codes. Psychiatrists may also bill when providing psychotherapy/counseling services.

iv. CPT codes are available differentiating between the type of therapy provided (i.e., individual, family, group), the expediency of therapy (i.e., routine care or crisis), the therapeutic modality used (i.e., biofeedback, hypnotherapy, psychotherapy) and the length of time spent: noted in the table below.

c. Coding tips:

i. CPT 90785 is an add-on code to be used for interactive complexity. This code may be used with the psychiatric evaluation (90791; 90792; 99441-99443) and psychotherapy (90832-90834, 90836-90838, 90853) (American Psychological Association; 2016).

Neuropsychology

1. Neuropsychologists evaluate the relationship between the brain (cognition/mental health) and the behavior stemming from illness involving or injury to the central nervous system.

a. Associations:

i. National Academy of Neuropsychology: https://www.nanonline.org

ii. American Board of Clinical Neuropsychology: https://theabcn.org

iii. American Academy of Clinical Neuropsychology: https://theaacn.org

iv. The Society for Clinical Neuropsychology: https://scn40.org

b. Coding:

i. Neuropsychologists are not physicians and do not bill using E/M codes.

ii. Neuropsychologists provide testing and analytical services and bill according to the services rendered.

iii. Developmental/emotional/behavioral screening and testing (96110, 96112, 96113, and 96127).

iv. Neurobehavioral status examinations (96116 and 96121)

v. Neuropsychological testing (96132 and 96133)

vi. Psychological/neuropsychological testing (96136, 96137, 96138 and 96139)

c. Coding tips:

i. The codes used are dependent both on the type of testing as well as the credentials of the person performing the testing (i.e., physician, psychologist, therapist or technician).

ii. For automated testing and results for psychological / neuropsychological testing use code 96146.

iii. The codes are time based. When developing a life care plan, indicate the number for units planned for each code included.

iv. Code 99484 can be used with the codes noted above when providing case management specific for behavioral health conditions; limited to 20 minutes per month.

Psychology

1. Psychologists are therapists who are educated in the mind and behavior. They provide services to people with mental health conditions and those going through distressing or difficult times. Various titles are used including therapist; psychotherapists; counselor; analyst; cognitive behavior therapists; and psychoanalysts.

a. Association:

i. American Psychological Association: https://www.apa.org

ii. Association for Psychological Science: https://www.psychologicalscience.org

iii. American Counseling Association: https://counseling.org

iv. American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy: https://www.aamft.org

v. There is an extensive list available on the website (https://mindremakeproject.org) for Mind Remake Project, a therapy and mental health resource site: 78 Professional Membership Organizations for Mental Health Workers. The article was updated 01/22/22 and includes sub-sections of different professional organizations. Examples include:

1. American Psychiatric Association: Goal: "To promote the rights and best interests of patients and those actually or potentially making use of psychiatric services for mental illness, including substance use disorders (American Psychiatric Association Goals)."

2. American Psychological Association "is the leading scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States, with more than 146,000 researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants, and students as its members (American Psychological Association: About)."

3. Anxiety Disorders Association of America "works to prevent, treat, and cure anxiety disorders and depression (Anxiety & Depression Association of America: About)."

4. Mental Health America's "work is driven by its commitment to promote mental health as a critical part of overall wellness, including prevention services for all; early identification and intervention for those at risk; integrated care, services, and supports for those who need them; with recovery as the goal (https://www.mhanational.org/policy-issues)."

5. National Alliance on Mental Illness "is the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans affected by mental illness (https://nami.org/About-NAMI)."

6. National Alliance of Professional Psychology Providers "mission is to promote and advocate for the clinical practice of doctoral level psychology (https://www.nappp.org/)."

7. National Association of County Behavioral Health & Developmental Disabilities: "Through education, policy analysis, and advocacy, NACBHDD brings the unique perspective of our members to Congress and the Executive Branch and promotes national policies that recognize and support the critical role counties play in caring for people affected by mental illness, addiction, and developmental disabilities (https://nacbhdd.org/)."

8. North American Mental Health Professional Advice Council "is a nonprofit group dedicated to mental health resources. Run by advocates and volunteers, the NAMHPAC strives to provide professional guidance to improve your well-being (https://www.namhpac.org/)."

9. National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors represents "state executives responsible for the public mental health service delivery system serving millions of people annually in all 50 states, 6 territories and pacific jurisdictions, and the District of Columbia (https://www.nasmhpd.org/)."

10. National Council for Mental Wellbeing is "a 501(c)(3) association and the unifying voice of organizations that deliver mental health and substance use services in America (https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/?s=501)."

11. National Institute of Mental Health "is the lead federal agency for research on mental disorders. NIMH is one of the 27 Institutes and Centers that make up the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the largest biomedical research agency in the world. NIH is part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) (https://www.nimh.nih.gov/about)."

12. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration "is the agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that leads public health efforts to advance the behavioral health of the nation (US Department of Health.Substance.Mental Health)."

b. Coding:

i. Psychological services use CPT codes: evaluation (90791) and psychotherapy (90832–90853). Code 99441 – 99443 may be used for telephone evaluation/management visits, however, are not specific to mental health. Code 99484 for case management related to mental health can be added; limited to 20 minutes per month.

ii. As with psychiatry, CPT codes are available differentiating between the type of therapy provided (i.e., individual, family, group), the expediency of therapy (i.e., routine care or crisis), the therapeutic modality used (i.e., biofeedback, hypnotherapy, psychotherapy) and the length of time spent: noted in the table below.

c. Coding tips:

i. The American Psychological Association published a billing and coding guide in 2019, which can be found online at https://www.apaservices.org/practice/reimbursement/health-codes/testing/billing-coding.pdf

ii. The APA also published a case study addendum https://www.apaservices.org/practice/reimbursement/health-codes/testing/billing-coding-addendum.pdf

iii. CPT 90785 is an add-on code to be used for interactive complexity. This code may be used with the psychiatric evaluation (90791); care provided via the telephone (99441-99443) and psychotherapy (90832-90834, 90836-90838, 90853).

Behavioral Health Specialist

1. Behavioral Health Specialists are trained to provide counseling to people dealing with mental illness.

   a. Association:

      i. American Mental Health Counselors Association: https://www.amhca.org/home

      ii. National Association for Behavioral Healthcare: https://www.nabh.org

      iii. National Council for Mental Wellbeing: https://www.thenationalcouncil.org

   b. Coding:

      i. In addition to using the codes listed for psychologists, code 96127 is used for an emotional/behavior assessment.

      ii. Code 99484 may be used for case management services related to a behavioral health condition; limited to 20 minutes per month.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapists

1. Cognitive Behavioral Therapists are licensed psychologists, social workers and counselors utilizing Cognitive Behavioral Therapy in the treatment of mental health conditions.

   a. Association:

      i. Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies: https://www.abct.org

   b. Coding:

      i. The code used for an initial CBT evaluation is 90791. Subsequent sessions are coded as 90834 which is for 50 minutes of individual psychotherapy; the standard length of a CBT session.

      ii. Codes for group and or caregiver behavior management training without the patient present are 96202 (initial 60 minutes) and 96203 (each additional 15 minutes).

      iii. Codes for Remote Therapeutic Monitoring (RTM) when measuring Cognitive Behavior Therapy include: 98978 (measuring adherence and response; each 30 days); 98980 (First 20 minutes in a calendar month); and 98981 (each additional 20 minutes).

      iv. Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT) is a type of CBT used for patients who have experienced trauma (i.e., child abuse, combat, rape and natural disasters) (APA (2017) Cognitive Processing Therapy). This therapy is often 12 sessions and is coded the same as CBT.

Emergency Services and Inpatient Specific Codes

1. For people with mental health concerns, the Emergency Department can be an important resource for care, particularly on a continuum when urgent care is needed. Emergency Departments are able to access psychiatric evaluations and connect patients with resources in their community that may otherwise be difficult to gain access to (Navas, C., et al. (2022 July 13).

   a. Coding:

      i. Consultation codes while in the Emergency Department include: CPT 99242 – 99255.

      ii. Emergency Department Services CPT codes are 99281 – 99288.

2. Observation services are commonly seen for patients presenting to an emergency department and either require additional time to receive treatment or are being monitored to make a decision regarding inpatient admission or discharge.

   a. Typically, less than 48 hours are spent in observation.

   b. CPT codes 99221 – 99239 are used for observation from admission to discharge.

   c. Consultation codes when the patient is in observation 99252 – 99255.

1. Inpatient services from admission to discharge:

   a. CPT codes 99221 – 99239 are used for inpatient stays from the initial day to discharge.

   b. Consultation codes for an inpatient stay include 99252 – 99255.

   c. Inpatient Critical Care: 99291 – 99292

   d. Diagnosis Related Groups (DRGs) for inpatient stays related to mental health include:

      i. DRG 880: Acute Adjustment Reaction and Psychosocial Dysfunction

      ii. DRG 881: Depressive neuroses

      iii. DRG 882: Neuroses Except Depressive

      iv. DRG 883: Disorders of Personality and Impulse Control

      v. DRG 884: Organic Disturbances and Mental Retardation

      vi. DRG 885: Psychoses

      vii. DRG 886: Behavioral and Developmental Disorders

      viii. DRG 887: Other Mental Disorder Diagnoses (Centers for Medicare-Medicaid Services ICD-10)

Conclusion: Whether developing or rebutting a life care plan or bill review, it is important for the life care planner to know the proper medical billing codes pertaining to the diagnosis and treatment of mental health. The AMA provides annual reviews of the CPT codes; revising, deleting in addition to releasing new code (AAPC; CPT). The codes go into effect on January 1st each year. In 2023 for instance, there were 393 editorial changes including 225 new codes, 75 deletions and 93 revisions; a total of 10,969 codes available (American Medical Association, 2022). Professional association websites at the national, regional and state levels are useful ways to stay up to date on the CPT codes and their current application.

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