

CPT Code Update

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In January 2005, the American Medical Association (AMA) replaced existing Current Procedural Terminology (CPT) codes for acupuncture and electroacupuncture with an entirely new set of codes. Subsequently, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) published valuations for these new codes. Due to an error in the publication, however, these initial RVUs significantly undervalued acupuncture services. Acupuncturists across the nation were adversely impacted by this CMS error. As a direct result of these published rates, many commercial insurance companies and managed care networks reduced the “customary and reasonable” amounts for the new CPT codes to rates far below what many providers consider minimum payment for these services.

The CMS has just published a new determination of “customary and reasonable” fees for the acupuncture CPT codes introduced at the beginning of 2005. As a result of the new determination, CMS has increased these fees by an average of 63 percent for acupuncture and electroacupuncture.

The acupuncture profession has been deeply concerned about the implications of these low RVU values. Acupuncture associations nationwide have been deeply concerned for the financial future of their members and the profession.

The National CPT Code Task Force, sponsored by the American Association of Oriental Medicine has worked collaboratively with other associations, federal and state agencies to present a united front focused on addressing the deficiencies in the new codes and their valuations.

The National CPT Task Force is pleased to report that effective July 1, 2005, CMS has published corrected

relative value unit amounts retroactively to Jan. 1, 2005 for the new acupuncture CPT

codes (97810, 97811, 97813, and 97814). This information published by CMS will positively affect the financial lives and practices of acupuncturists across the nation.

If you are interested in the nuts-and-bolts details behind these changes, they are available at www.aaom.info/calc_0605_rvu.pdf and www.aimsaction.org/advocacy/news/ene_ws_cpt_050715_detail.htm.

The National CPT Code Task Force will continue its work by facilitating the dissemination of this new information, by educating commercial and other insurance carriers, and by providing carriers with the data needed to make fair determinations of “reasonable and customary” fees. Insurers have historically utilized the CMS fee schedule as the de facto “minimum wage” indicator for providers across the nation. These changes will affect every provider of service nationwide.

The Task Force is currently collecting data from acupuncturists around the nation to help prioritize our education efforts. Please go to the www.aaom.org and click on the EOB data base link and fill out the information form. This information will help identify areas and companies that need our attention. Only by staying informed, educated and active in our organizations can the profession pull together and fight to preserve our financial future.

