Modifier 59 and 51. Do we need both?

November 1, 2018

**Question:**
Should we append both 59 and 51 when a code is bundled and is also a subsequent procedure?

**Answer:**
Modifier 59 is only used if two codes are bundled, specifically if there is a NCCI edits for the two codes. If there is no edit, a modifier 51 is used. Over-use of modifier 59 is an audit target, so its use should be reserved for this scenario.

And when modifier 59 is used appropriately, a modifier 51 is redundant and unnecessary. Modifier 59 is always placed on a subsequent, lower valued code negating the need for modifier 51.

*This response is based on the best information available as of 11/01/18.*

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Trauma Laparotomy

October 18, 2018

**Question:**
Is there a specific CPT code for trauma laparotomy?
Answer:
No. if an exploratory laparotomy is performed and no injuries are detected and repaired, Exploratory laparotomy, exploratory celiotomy with or without biopsy(s) (separate procedure) is coded. If the retroperitoneum is also explored code 49010 Exploration, retroperitoneal area with or without biopsy(s) (separate procedure) instead of 49000. Both codes would never be reported together.

Note that each laparotomy code is designated as a separate procedure, meaning they are bundled if any more complex procedure is performed. So if the spleen is removed, the liver repaired, small bowel resections are performed, etc., only those definite procedures would be reported.

*This response is based on the best information available as of 10/18/18.

Coding Mesentery Repair

October 4, 2018

Question:
Documentation states that the mesentery was repaired as part of where the liver was packed. How is this reported?

Answer:
Code 44850, Suture of mesentery (separate procedure) is designated as a separate procedure and therefore is included in the more comprehensive procedure, the liver packing. The separate procedure designation means that the procedure is usually a component of a more complex service and is not
reported in addition to the more complex service in performed in the same anatomic area.

*This response is based on the best information available as of 10/04/18.

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Separate Procedure Coding

September 20, 2018

**Question:**
What does the term “separate procedure” mean at the end of a code?

**Answer:**
Separate procedure is a confusing term. It means that the procedure is usually a component of a more complex service and is not reported in addition to the more complex service if performed in the same anatomic area. A typical example is enterolysis (lysis of adhesions) which is designated as a separate procedure and not reported separately at the same session as a more complex procedure, such as a colectomy, cholecystectomy, etc. If lysis of adhesions is extensive and the additional time and intensity is documented, a modifier 22 may be added to the primary code.

*This response is based on the best information available as of 09/20/18.
Coding a Colotomy

September 6, 2018

Question:
How is this scenario coded? A segment of the colon is opened to remove a foreign body and then closed. No resection and no perforation.

Answer:
The scenario you describe is a colotomy; making an incision in the colon through which the colon is explored for biopsy or foreign body removal. This is coded as 44025, Colotomy, for exploration, biopsy(s), or foreign body removal.

*This response is based on the best information available as of 09/06/18, 3:00 PM Central Time (CT).

Is a Suture a Resection?

August 23, 2018

Question:
Is a suture repair of the colon considered a resection?

Answer:
No. Suture repair of the colon (large intestine) is coded as 44604. This might be done for an injury or perforation for disease. The code include repair of a single or multiple
perforation. Resection involves removing a portion of the colon.

*This response is based on the best information available as of 08/23/18.

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**What is Defined as “Operating Room”**

August 9, 2018

**Question:**
What is considered an operating/procedure room when billing complications with a modifier 78? Does an office procedure room count?

**Answer:**
According to Medicare, the treatment of complications is separately billable only when performed an approved operative suite which includes an OR, ASC, endoscopy or angiography suite.

*This response is based on the best information available as of 08/09/18.
Thrombolysis Through a Chest Tube

July 26, 2018

**Question:**
How is installation of tPA into a chest tube coded?

**Answer:**
Report this with the following codes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CPT Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>32561</td>
<td>Instillation(s), via chest tube/catheter, agent for fibrinolysis (eg, fibrinolytic agent for break up of multiloculated effusion); initial day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32562</td>
<td>subsequent day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each of these codes is reported once per day only.

*This response is based on the best information available as of 10/30/18.*

Ligating a Vessel in a Trauma
Question:
What codes are used for ligating a vessel due to a traumatic injury?

Answer:
See codes 37565-37618, below. Select a code based on the anatomic area of the vessel. For example, Ligation, major artery (eg, post-traumatic, rupture); neck for ligating the jugular vein.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CPT Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>37565</td>
<td>Ligation, major artery (eg, post-traumatic, rupture); neck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37616</td>
<td>chest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37617</td>
<td>abdomen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37618</td>
<td>extremity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*This response is based on the best information available as of 07/18/18.*
Discontinuity: Return the OR

June 28, 2018

Question:
The bowel was left in discontinuity as part of damage control surgery. What do I code when I take the patient back to surgery to complete the anastomosis?

Answer:
When you return the patient to the OR to complete the surgery, a 58 modifier (staged procedure) will be appended to the subsequent surgery codes.

*This response is based on the best information available as of 06/28/18.*