

Cardiology Coding Alert

Reader Question: Dial Into New CPT® 2020 Online E/M Code

Question: One of my colleagues said that CPT® 2020 will delete current online E/M code 99444. Is this true, and if so, which codes will we report instead of 99444?

California Subscriber

Answer: Yes. CPT® 2020 will delete current online E/M code 99444. In place of 99444, you will receive new code 99421 (Online digital evaluation and management service, for an established patient, for up to 7 days, cumulative time during the 7 days; 5-10 minutes).

Like its predecessor, 99421 has some significant restrictions, which stipulate that the service has to be:

- Provided to an established patient (or guardian),
- Provided by a physician or other qualified health care professional (QHP), and
- Unrelated to an E/M service provided within the previous seven days.

This means that any online digital E/M service that results from a previous, or that results in a subsequent, E/M visit is not separately reported, and the online E/M service is incorporated into the related E/M visit.

Also, CPT® has placed a seven-day cumulative time limitation on 99421 and made the code time-dependent. You will be able to use 99421 if your provider spends between five and 10 minutes on any asynchronous communications with the patient in that time; you will also be able to report longer time increments with new codes 99422 (... 11-20 minutes) or 99423 (... 21 or more minutes).

The deletion of 99444, and its replacement with 99421-99423, presents a teachable moment for coders and their providers.

"Coders will need to work with their providers to ensure that they are documenting the time factors of the new codes," says **Chelle Johnson, CPMA, CPC, CPCO, CPPM, CEMC, AAPC Fellow**, billing/credentialing/auditing/coding coordinator at County of Stanislaus Health Services Agency in Modesto, California. "The time component was not required for 99444, so this will be an opportunity for education."