Exploring All Avenues
Role of Prior Encounters in Queries

The American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) the Association of Clinical Documentation Improvement Specialists (ACDIS) have come together and updated the Guidelines for Achieving a Complaint Query practice for 2019. One of the most consequential additions is related to the the role of using documentation of prior encounters in queries. The practice brief examines reasons for this new development. In summary, they include:

1. The evolving role of CDI beyond reimbursement to ensuring health record integrity

2. Implementation of the EHR allows for easier access to patient information

3. CMS initiatives that expands the "episode for care" across settings

4. Aggregation of healthcare data across settings

The practice brief provides guidance on when prior encounter information can be brought forward from a prior encounter to a new encounter. For example, it would be appropriate to bring forward an echocardiogram report for a current admission for congestive heart failure (CHF) to validate the specificity (i.e. diastolic, systolic) of the CHF. On the other hand, it would be inappropriate to "mine" the previous encounter for additional diagnoses that have no bearing on the current encounter. Another example, the practice brief examines is when we need to clarify a past history of a malignancy versus an active status of cancer. Using a prior encounter can provide more information that may aid us in assigning the correct code via a query.

Guidelines for Achieving a Compliant Query Practice

Role of Prior Encounter Query Examples

The practice brief also provides query examples that can aid staff members in the decision to use information from a prior encounter. Check out Appendix B of the Practice Brief on Guidelines for Achieving a Compliant Query

These document can be located on the AHIMA or ACDIS website to members for free using the following links:

Appendix B

Guidelines for Achieving a Complaint Query Practice (2019) - AHIMA
Guidelines for Achieving a Compliant Query Practice - 2019 update (ACDIS)

When considering information from a prior encounter you want to determine if the diagnosis meets reporting guidelines for additional diagnoses which include clinical evaluation, therapeutic treatment, diagnostic procedures, extending the hospital stay, increases nursing care and/or monitoring.

As always it would be inappropriate to code a diagnosis documented on prior encounter. Likewise, the current encounter documentation must validate the need for a query.

AHIMA Query Toolkit

AHIMA Inpatient Query toolkit provides many query templates that you may find useful at your organization. The toolkit is free for AHIMA members and can located using the following link: AHIMA INPATIENT QUERY TOOLKIT

Other references are also provided within the practice brief in Appendix C.