Morbid Obesity and Body Mass Index (BMI):
Get the skinny on correct coding

Morbid obesity and certain body mass index (BMI) codes have been assigned to their own Hierarchical Condition Category (HCC) as part of the changes to the risk adjustment model that took effect with 2013 dates of service for 2014 payment year. Therefore, a review of the ICD-9-CM coding guidelines and AHA Coding Clinic will provide clarity on how to properly assign codes for these conditions.

Morbid Obesity
Diagnostic criterion for morbid obesity varies among the medical community. For example, surgical standards consider a BMI of 35%-39% and at least one co-morbid condition as grade I morbid obesity. For coding purposes, the condition of morbid obesity (278.01) is defined in ICD-9-CM as a BMI of 40% or greater. Coders should ensure that the documented BMI supports the diagnosis of morbid obesity according to the ICD-9-CM guidelines.

Supporting Documentation / MEAT
Per Coding Clinic Q3, 2011, “Individuals who are overweight, obese, or morbidly obese are at an increased risk for certain medical conditions when compared to persons of normal weight. Therefore, these conditions are always clinically significant and reportable when documented by the provider.” Based on this advice, we can assign the code for morbid obesity with or without a treatment plan. However, coders must still ensure proper coding guidelines are followed.

Body Mass Index
BMI (V85) codes are not to be assigned when a clinical diagnosis has not been stated by the provider. Coding Clinic Q2, 2010, states “The associated diagnosis (such as overweight, obesity, or underweight) must be documented by the provider in order to assign codes for BMI.” Additionally, Coding Clinic Q3, 2011, states, “Body mass index (BMI) codes meet the requirement for clinical significance when a clinical diagnosis is documented.” According to the ICD-9-CM codebook, when coding for overweight and obesity an additional code should be used to identify the BMI if known.

As ICD-10 implementation draws near (Oct. 1) coders should focus on code comparisons between ICD-9 and ICD-10. The goal is to assist with transitioning into the new code set.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ICD-9 Code</th>
<th>ICD-10 Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>278.01 Morbid obesity</td>
<td>E66.01 Morbid (severe) obesity due to excess calories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V85.4x (BMI) 40 or greater, adult</td>
<td>Z68.4x Body mass index (BMI) 40 or greater, adult</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>