

## coding corner

### coding for new patients vs. established patients

*relating to coding and office visit frequency*

When distinguishing between new and established patients, it is important to know the definition of these terms to report these services appropriately.

- A new patient is one who has not received any professional services from the physician, or another physician of the same specialty who belongs to the same group practice, within the past three years. \*
- An established patient is one who has received professional services from the physician or another physician of the same specialty who belongs to the same group practice, within the past three years. \*

Please note that professional services are not only the face-to-face physician/patient encounter but also are services from a physician, such as renewing a prescription or providing test results. Therefore, it is possible for a patient to receive professional services without having a face-to-face physician encounter. [For office visits, this applies to professional services rendered in all settings. \*\*]

### subspecialties encounters

It is possible for a patient receiving professional services from a subspecialist within the same group to be considered a new patient to another physician within that group. If the subspecialist within the same group practice has a separate tax identification number for their subspecialty, different from that of the general group TIN, then the patient receiving professional services from the subspecialist may be considered a new patient. Some examples of this are an electrophysiology specialist in a cardiology group and a hand surgeon within an orthopedic group.<sup>2</sup>

\* *CPT 2005 Standard Edition*

\*\* *CPT Assistant, Volume 9, Issue 6, June 1999*