

## **Applying the 7th Characters for Injury, Poisoning and Certain Other Consequences of External Causes**

The following information is being provided in response to many requests for assistance in applying ICD-10-CM's 7th characters. The ICD-10-CM provides a 7th character in Chapter 15, Pregnancy, Childbirth and the Puerperium, Chapter 19, Injury, Poisoning and Certain Other Consequences of External Causes (includes complications of surgical and medical care), and Chapter 20, External Causes of Morbidity. In the injury and external cause sections, the 7th character is used to provide specific information about the episode of care (e.g., initial encounter, subsequent encounter, and sequelae). The 7th character is also applied to fracture codes to provide additional detail, such as closed fracture, open fracture (with type), routine healing, delayed healing, and non-union. In the obstetrics section the 7th character is used for certain complications of multiple gestational pregnancies to identify the specific fetus that is being affected by the condition. This article will only focus on the 7th character used for codes in chapters 19 and 20.

To provide clarification on the use of the 7th character, revisions (shown in bold below) have been made to the guidelines. The Official Guidelines for Coding and Reporting state:

Most categories in chapter 19 have a 7th character requirement for each applicable code. Most categories in this chapter have three 7th character values (with the exception of fractures): A, initial encounter, D, subsequent encounter and S, sequela. Categories for traumatic fractures have additional 7th character values. While the patient may be seen by a new or different provider over the course of treatment for an injury, assignment of the 7th character is based on whether the patient is undergoing active treatment and not whether the provider is seeing the patient for the first time.

For complication codes, active treatment refers to treatment for the condition described by the code, even though it may be related to an earlier precipitating problem. For example, code T84.50XA, Infection and inflammatory reaction due to unspecified internal joint prosthesis, initial encounter, is used when active treatment is provided for the infection, even though the condition relates to the prosthetic device, implant or graft that was placed at a previous encounter.

7th character "A", initial encounter is used while the patient is receiving active treatment for the condition. Examples of active treatment are: surgical treatment, emergency department encounter, and evaluation and continuing treatment by the same or a different physician.

7th character "D" subsequent encounter is used for encounters after the patient has received active treatment of the condition and is receiving routine care for the condition during the healing or recovery phase. Examples of subsequent care are: cast change or removal, an x-ray to check healing status of fracture, removal of external or internal fixation device, medication adjustment, other aftercare and follow up visits following treatment of the injury or condition.

The aftercare Z codes should not be used for aftercare for conditions such as injuries or poisonings, where 7th characters are provided to identify subsequent care. For example, for aftercare of an injury, assign the acute injury code with the 7th character "D" (subsequent encounter).

7th character "S", sequela, is for use for complications or conditions that arise as a direct result of a condition, such as scar formation after a burn. The scars are sequelae of the burn. When using 7th

character "S", it is necessary to use both the injury code that precipitated the sequela and the code for the sequela itself. The "S" is added only to the injury code, not the sequela code. The 7th character "S" identifies the injury responsible for the sequela. The specific type of sequela (e.g., scar) is sequenced first, followed by the injury code.

Assign the external cause code with the appropriate 7th character (initial encounter, subsequent encounter or sequela) for each encounter in which the injury or condition is being treated. Most categories in chapter 20 have a 7th character requirement for each applicable code. Most categories in this chapter have three 7th character values: A, initial encounter, D, subsequent encounter and S, sequela. While the patient may be seen by a new or different provider over the course of treatment for an injury or condition, assignment of the 7th character for the external cause should match the 7th character of the code assigned for the associated injury or condition for the encounter.

The complete set of ICD-10-CM Official Guidelines for Coding and Reporting is posted on the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) website, [http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/icd/ICD10cmguidelines\\_2015%209\\_26\\_2014.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/icd/ICD10cmguidelines_2015%209_26_2014.pdf), and the AHA Central Office website, [www.ahacentraloffice.org](http://www.ahacentraloffice.org).

The following examples are intended to help clarify the use of the 7th characters: