



## UEI Coding Alert # 7

### November 30, 2005

#### Use 2 Diabetes Codes for ICD-9 Compliance

#### *Proper diagnosis coding can help avoid denials*

You've found the correct ICD-9 code for diabetic retinopathy, but don't stop there or your claim will be incomplete - you must also pick a code that describes the kind of diabetes that caused the retinopathy.

Under the "diabetic retinopathy" (362.0x) heading, ICD-9 directs you to "Code first diabetes (250.5x)". Use code 250.5x (*Diabetes with ophthalmic manifestations*) as a primary diagnosis and use the diabetic retinopathy code as a secondary diagnosis.

Choose the appropriate digit (0 or 1) to put at the end of 250.5X. Each possible fifth digit describes a type of diabetes and whether it's controlled or uncontrolled. These fifth digits apply to all the codes in the 250.xx series (*Diabetes mellitus*):

- 0 - *Type 2 or unspecified type, not stated as uncontrolled*
- 1 - *Type 1 (juvenile type), not stated as uncontrolled*

Be specific: CPT uses pancreatic beta cell function to distinguish Type 1 (250.51) from Type 2 (250.50). A Type 1 diabetes patient's pancreatic beta cells can secrete no insulin; in Type 2 diabetes, these cells are impaired but can still secrete some insulin. A Type 1 patient must use insulin; a Type 2 patient might use insulin, depending on the severity of the disease or on the compliance /cost of the medications.

Best bet: The doctor should be able to determine which type of diabetes a patient is receiving treatment for after discussion with the patient. Keep in mind that if a patient is diagnosed as diabetic and is *not using* insulin, you know it is definitely Type 2 - 250.50.

Golden rule: Code the patient's chief complaint. If they're coming in because they've been sent by their primary-care physician for an examination and they have no ophthalmic manifestations use 250.xx. But if they come in complaining of halos or blurred vision, then their actual diagnosis or complaint would be the first diagnostic code, and then the diabetic codes second.