

Risk Coding Tips and Tools

Guidelines for Documentation and Coding of Uncertain Diagnosis

In the outpatient setting, physicians should never assign a diagnosis unless that diagnosis has been confirmed by diagnostic testing or is otherwise certain. The information contained here is in reference to Uncertain Diagnoses in the Outpatient Setting.

Uncertain Diagnoses Include:

- Probable
- Suspected
- Questionable
- “Rule Out”
- Differential
- Working
- Consistent/Compatible With
- Likely
- Possible
- OR other similar terms indicating uncertainty

Guidelines:

- If the physician is unable to determine a definitive diagnosis, document the condition(s) to the highest degree of certainty for the encounter or visit, such as symptoms, signs abnormal test results or other reason for the visit.
- The provider should never report a condition that does not exist, or they are clinically uncertain if it exists. If the patient presents with signs and symptoms, the provider will report those.
- If the definitive diagnosis fails to present a complete picture of the patient’s condition, the provider may document additional signs and symptoms.

Reference: www.cms.gov/files/document/2021-coding-guidelines-updated-12162020.pdf

You can also contact us at RiskCoding@OrlandoHealth.com for additional questions or support needs.

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Physician Documentation Examples

Example 1:

The provider documents that the patient has “Fatigue, suspect iron deficiency anemia”
Diagnosis code assigned from this statement = Fatigue

Example 2:

Patient’s renal function shows decline and estimated GFR is 17 which is consistent with stage 4 chronic kidney disease

Diagnosis code assigned from this statement = The coder would need to task the provider for further clarification as the CKD Stage 4 would not be coded due to the uncertain verbiage

Example 3:

CC: Tingling and burning in feet

Foot Exam: Monofilament test shows loss of sensation in both feet

Assessment: The patient likely has polyneuropathy from his diabetes

Diagnosis codes assigned from this statement = Tingling and Burning