

WHAT IS A “NEW” PATIENT?

Regardless if it is someone that just completed a 2 week online course on medical billing from a “college” or online school or a seasoned biller, the question comes up often asking “can we bill with a new patient visit code?”.

Almost all commercial carriers, and the AMA consider a new patient “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.”

Sometimes the question comes up about a cardiologist or Internal medicine physician that interprets EKGs from the hospital who has done an interp on a patient they have never seen. Does that preclude them from ever charging a new patient visit if the patient eventually comes to see them? No, it doesn't as Medicare added the caveat “in person” or “face-to-face” to the definition of a new patient visit, so if the doctor has not provided a face-to-face professional encounter to the patient within the previous 3 years, it can still be a new patient visit.

If a physician moves from one group practice to another, and it's been within 3 years since that doctor has seen the patient in the previous group practice, it's still an established patient when the patient comes to the new group practice. If that patient has seen another doctor within the same group, of the same specialty, within 3 years, that patient is still considered an established patient. The only exception I know to this rule is in North & South Carolina for Workers compensation. On a new injury, the WC rules allow for a new patient visit to be billed. We're not aware of any other states that have that rule - but check with yours to be safe.

Don't forget, folks, that a new patient visit does require all 3 components (history, exam and medical decision making) be documented if you hope to bill a new patient visit.