FOCUS ON: PRESSURE ULCERS

Pressure ulcers are lesions caused by unrelieved pressure that results in damage to the underlying tissue. Generally, these are the result of soft tissue compression between a bony prominence and an external surface for a prolonged period of time. The consequences of pressure-induced skin injury range from erythema of skin to deep ulcers extending to the bone. The prevalence of pressure ulcers may be more widespread than initially thought particularly as the number of vulnerable elderly patients increases; it is estimated that over three million Americans may have pressure ulcers at a health system cost ranging from $1,000 to $40,000 in addition to the pain and suffering endured by the patient. There are two scales used frequently to assess the risk of pressure ulcer: the Norton Scale and the Braden Scale.

RISK FACTORS BASED ON THE BRADEN SCALE

- Inability to sense or respond to discomfort related to pressure (e.g. unresponsive or reduced responsiveness)
- Exposure to moisture, such as urine or perspiration
- Inactivity, such as bed or chair confinement
- Restricted ability to change positions (e.g. limited or no mobility)
- Poor nutritional status
- Increased exposure to friction and shear, such as sliding against bed sheets, chair or restraints

DESCRIPTIONS OF STAGING

Stage I: Non-blanching erythema
Stage II: Abrasion, blister, shallow open crater, or other partial thickness skin loss
Stage III: Full thickness skin loss involving damage or necrosis into subcutaneous soft tissues
Stage IV: Full thickness skin loss with necrosis of soft tissues through to the muscle, tendons or tissues around underlying bone
Unstageable: Lesion inaccessible for evaluation due to non-removable dressings, eschar, sterile blister and suspected deep injury in evolution

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Always...

- Document both the site and the stage of the pressure ulcer.
- Code both the site and the stage of the pressure ulcer even if the stage is not specified, see below.
- Document as “ulcer” and not as “wounds,” “open wounds” or “lesions.”

Documentation and Coding Tips

Synonymous terms for a pressure ulcer may include decubitus ulcer, bed sore or plaster ulcer.

707.00-707.07, 707.09 identifies the site of the pressure ulcer:
- 707.00 Unspecified site
- 707.01 Elbow
- 707.02 Upper back, shoulder blades
- 707.03 Lower back, coccyx, sacrum
- 707.04 Hip
- 707.05 Buttock
- 707.06 Ankle
- 707.07 Heel
- 707.09 Other site, head

707.20-707.25 identifies the stage of the pressure ulcer:
- 707.20 Unspecified stage
- 707.21 Stage I
- 707.22 Stage II
- 707.23 Stage III
- 707.24 Stage IV
- 707.25 Unstageable

Coding Example

Assessment: Decubitus ulcer of sacrum, stage III
- Code for Site: 707.03 Pressure ulcer lower back, coccyx, sacrum
- Code for Stage: 707.23 Pressure ulcer stage III

*The example presented is only a portion of a comprehensive progress note, which must include evaluative language which supports the assessment, in addition to a plan of care.