

HEALTH AND BEHAVIOR ASSESSMENT CPT CODES

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The Health and Behavior Assessment (H and B) Current Procedural Terminology (CPT) Codes were introduced to the physician fee schedule in January 2002, after several years of development, in which NASW was an active participant. (NASW's role in the development of these codes is discussed in the Clinical Social Work Practice Update, *New Health and Behavior Assessment CPT Codes for use by Clinical Social Workers*.) These codes identify the psychological, behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and social factors significant to prevention, treatment, or management of a physical illness. The primary focus of the assessment is on the biopsychosocial factors important to physical health and treatment. These codes identify services that clinical social workers are trained to perform and have been conducting for years without compensation. The social work profession was excited to finally have reimbursement procedures identified for physical health purposes.

Unfortunately, NASW discovered in April 2002 that Medicare would not reimburse the H and B codes to clinical social workers. However, private insurers have the option of reimbursing clinical social workers for services describing the descriptors of these codes. The reason for the denial of Medicare payment is due to Medicare's restricted definition of what services clinical social workers can perform. Section 1861(s)(2) of the Social Security Act defines clinical social work services as the "diagnosis and treatment of mental illnesses." The H and B codes are unrelated to mental illness and focus only on patients' physical health.

NASW has had several discussions with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) about the lack of reimbursement from Medicare to clinical social workers for the

H and B Codes. As a result of these discussions, it is necessary for NASW to seek a legislative change of the definition of clinical social work in order for clinical social workers to receive payment. The Association has broadened the definition of services that clinical social workers can perform and introduced a legislative change to amend section 1861(s)(2) of the Social Security Act. Until Congress approves this amendment, clinical social workers should not utilize these codes when billing for Medicare services. However, they may contact private insurers directly for prior approval to use these codes when appropriate.

Questions about the H and B codes may be directed to mcoleman@naswdc.org or 202-336-8265.

Clinical social workers are independently reimbursed for mental health services provided in outpatient settings under Medicare Part B. They have access to many of the non-evaluation and management codes used to describe psychotherapy services, such as individual, group, and family therapy.

RESOURCES

American Medical Association. (2002). *CPT 2003*. Chicago: Author.

Coleman, M. (2002). New health and behavior assessment CPT codes for use by clinical social workers. *Clinical Social Work Practice Update*. Vol. 2 No. 2. Washington, DC: NASW.