



PRACTICE ALERT

USING 90837* IN PRIVATE PRACTICE

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In 2013, 90837 was one of several psychotherapy procedural codes introduced to health care professionals such as clinical social workers and the health insurance industry. It is defined as individual psychotherapy services for 60 minutes and is a time code ranging from 53 minutes and beyond.

Traditionally, a 60 minute code was considered the average psychotherapy service code. However, the insurance industry did not adopt 90837 as such. Instead, 90834, a 45 minute individual psychotherapy code was adopted as the average psychotherapy service code. As a result, insurance companies developed policies about the use of 90837 which included the following:

- Some third-party payers require clinical social workers and other providers to seek prior authorization before using 90837.
- Other third-party payers have decided not to reimburse a psychotherapy service described by 90837.

- Medicare and many other insurance companies allow providers to use 90837. In this situation, a high volume usage of 90837 may place clinical social workers and other providers at risk for an audit.

To avoid overpayment requests and reimbursement problems, clinical social workers who desire to seek reimbursement from Medicare and other appropriate insurance companies should:

- Carefully review and follow the terms of their provider contracts and their policies regarding the usage of 90837.
- Document in the clinical record why the longer code, 90837, was used rather than the shorter codes, 90832 and 90834. Justification must be related to the patient's needs, not the clinical social worker's needs.
- Establish medical necessity for the use of 90837. Medical necessity tells why the service is warranted.
- Document the time the service began and ended.
- Document the patient's name or identification number on each page.
- Document each visit including a psychosocial evaluation, treatment plan, and process notes and sign them with the same name and credentials as provided on the provider application.

Following the above steps may assist clinical social workers in avoiding overpayment requests when using 90837. The national office has assisted many clinical social workers who encountered provider problems when using 90837 and will continue to do so. For assistance, members may send an email to mcoleman.nasw@socialworkers.com or participate in *An Hour With Private Practice (HOPP)* during the third Wednesday of the month from noon until 1:00 pm ET. Information about HOPP is available at <https://www.socialworkers.org/practice/an-hour-with-private-practice>