## New vs. Established Patients:
### When should I use a new patient E/M code vs. an established E/M code?

As with so many forms of healthcare delivery, coding for a new vs. an established patient can be confusing. In this month's CodingAlert, we will review how to properly code for each type of patient visit.

### Understanding New vs. Established Patients

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**Defining New vs. Established Patients**

**New Patient**

One who has not received any professional services from the physician/qualified health care professional or another physician/qualified health care professional of the exact same specialty and subspecialty who belongs to the same group practice, within the past three years.

- An interpretation of a diagnostic test, reading an x-ray or EKG, etc., in the absence of an E/M service or other face-to-face service with a patient does not affect the designation as a new patient.

- Physicians in the same group practice of the same specialty are to bill and be paid as though they were a single physician.

- Physicians who are of a different specialty may bill and be paid without regard to their membership in a group.

**Established Patient**

One who **has** not received any professional services from the physician/qualified health care professional or another physician/qualified health care professional of the exact same specialty and subspecialty who belongs to the same group practice, within the past three years.

- If a physician is on call or covering for another physician, a patient's encounter will be handled the same as if the unavailable physician were there.

**Additional Information**

- No distinction is made between new and established patients in the emergency department.

- Physicians who share the same Tax ID are part of the same group even if they are in different locations.

*Continued*

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**Comparison Chart**

| Common Scenarios | Established Patient | New Patient |
|---|---|---|
| A physician leaves a practice to join a new one. A patient follows the physician to the new practice. | Patient sees original physician at new practice. The patient is considered an established patient for all physicians of the same specialty at the practice. | Patient sees another physician in the new practice before seeing their original physician. For this physician, they are a new patient. |
| The professional component of a previous procedure is billed within 3 years (e.g., a lab interpretation is billed and no E/M service or other face-to-face service is billed). | | This patient remains a new patient for the initial E/M visit. |
| A family physician sees a new patient and refers to a surgeon in the same group with the same Tax ID. | | If the surgeon has not seen the patient in the past 3 years, he/she is considered a new patient since the two physicians are of different specialties. |
| A patient presents with a new problem within 3 years of a visit. | This is an established patient; a previous or new problem has no bearing on this. If it has been under 3 years since professional services were rendered, it is an established patient. | If it has been 3 years or more, it is a new patient. |