

Modifier 24

The 24 modifier is appended to indicate that a service other than treating and/or following up on the patient was performed during the global period. The 24 modifier is used in conjunction with E/M services and eye service codes ONLY. It is not appended to any other type of service. Let's look at some examples of how modifier 24 was used in a few recent charts reviewed by our auditing team and see if you can make the right determination on whether the service is separately reportable outside of the global surgical package.

Case #1: The patient presents for a 5-day follow up from lumbar hemilaminectomy and is complaining of discharge from the surgical site and low grade fever. The bandages are removed and the surgical site does have some drainage, and is mildly inflamed and red. Topical antibiotics are applied to the site and the bandage is reapplied. The patient is given a prescription of antibiotics and asked to return in 3 days for follow up.

Is the modifier 24 supported in this encounter? Not based on this documentation. The patient demonstrates a need for routine postoperative care. Although there is a complaint, that alone is not enough to support the use of the 24 modifier.

Case #2: Patient presents for follow up of closed fracture care of the right radius. It has been 10 days since the cast was placed. The patient is complaining of severe pain and swelling of the hand. The provider has the cast removed, notes swelling and orders an S-ray. On the X-ray, the provider notes an additional fracture to the scaphoid. The provider determines that because this was not known at the original casting, this portion of the wrist has not been stabilized, causing the pain and swelling. The bones are aligned and new casting is applied.

Is the modifier 24 supported in this encounter? Yes, it would be based upon the discovery of an additional fracture.

Note that one CMS carrier, First Coast Medicare is no longer paying for modifier 24 services without reviewing the documentation prior to processing the claim. These services are coming under more fire, and we must be sure we are auditing them correctly.

This Week's Tip Provided by:

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