

Appropriate indications for CXR

The Pre-operative assessment of a patient often includes a chest x-ray examination. While many have questioned the efficacy of a routine CXR on every patient, most agree that there is a subset of patients in which a CXR is medically necessary. However, one must remember that there are reimbursement issues for the hospital and patient with “Pre-op” as a diagnosis.

Medicare and most other providers will not reimburse the hospital for examinations without a proper diagnostic CPT code, sign or symptom. Indications including solely “Pre-operative” or “rule out” generally do not satisfy this criterion. Not only will unreimbursed studies affect the hospital, but the patient may receive the full bill for such a procedure.

Acceptable guidelines for pre-operative chest radiographs for elective non-cardiopulmonary surgery are as follows:

- 1) cardiopulmonary disease (if no CXR within the past year)
- 2) acute symptoms of respiratory or cardiac illness
- 3) possible primary or secondary malignancy
- 4) recent history of severe chest trauma
- 5) those patients whose operation may involve a thoracotomy
- 6) patients who may undergo a major abdominal surgery and who run a high risk of respiratory complications
- 7) heavy smokers without a recent CXR (past 12 months)
- 8) immigrants from countries with endemic TB (if no CXR in past 12 months)
- 9) patients not included in the above categories, if the request is made by the appropriate anesthesiologist.

Another potential pitfall in reimbursement is the indication of “rule out”, “history of”, “trauma” or “MVA”. Rather, signs and symptoms generally are more acceptable indications. For example: instead of “rule out chest disorder”, more appropriate indications would include: “shortness of breath”, “pneumonia”, “CHF”, “chest pain” or “pleural effusion”. Instead of “trauma” or “MVA”, more appropriate indications would include “ankle pain”, “swelling”, “decreased range of motion”, etc.

Attention to these issues will allow the radiology department to better serve our patients. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Dr. Wasley or Kirk Johnson at 378-7520.