Morbid Obesity

Overview

Morbid obesity is a serious condition. Symptoms build slowly over time and interfere with basic physical functions such as breathing and walking. Morbid obesity is associated with a shorter life expectancy and serious health consequences in the form of co-morbid conditions such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, and obstructive sleep apnea.

Often providers are reluctant to document obesity as "morbid" or "severe" for fear of offending patients. Patients however need to understand that obesity is a serious condition that can affect their overall health. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) defines adult overweight and obesity as:

- Morbid or severe obesity: Body Mass Index (BMI) ≥ 40 Kg/m2 and a BMI ≥ 35, if a patient has one or more co-morbid conditions that can be linked to obesity such as high blood pressure or diabetes
- Obesity: BMI 30 Kg/m2 or greater
- Overweight: 25 – 29.9 Kg/m2

Documentation

Documentation of "morbid obesity," as opposed to "obesity" or "overweight," is essential for selecting the diagnosis code that accurately represents the patient's condition. For example, when a provider documents the diagnosis of "overweight" or "obesity," but a patient has a BMI of 40 or above (indicating morbid obesity), the provider/coder must defer to the documented verbiage and not to the BMI value. In this case, the coder must select the code for "overweight" or "obesity" even though it's inconsistent with the documented BMI.

When reviewing morbid obesity with your patient, be sure to document the following:

- The diagnosis of morbid obesity or severe obesity
- Evaluation and/or treatment plan, such as weight loss, diet, exercise, and/or referral to a nutritionist
- BMI may be automatically calculated and documented by the electronic Medical Record or by a healthcare professional other than a physician, such as a dietitian

Coding

When coding morbid obesity:

- First assign an ICD-10 code for morbid obesity:
    - E66.01, Morbid (severe) obesity due to excess calories
- Then choose an appropriate code for patient's BMI:
    - Z68.35 – Z68.39, Body Mass Index (BMI) 35-39, adult
    - Z68.40 – Z68.45, Body Mass Index (BMI) 40 or greater, adult

- Code co-morbid conditions (e.g.; hypertension or diabetes) if the provider reviewed them with the patient during the face-to-face visit and documented them in the patient's medical records

Helpful tips
- You can find an online BMI calculator at: http://www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi/
- For more information about coding morbid obesity, email your provider clinical consultant at providerclinicalconsulting@premera.com