Posted on 08-01-2022

HIGHMARK CODING TIPS

August 2022

Reporting CPT Code 69440

Code 69440: Middle ear exploration through postauricular or ear canal incision.

Code 69436: Tympanostomy (requiring insertion of ventilating tube), general anesthesia.

In recent audits, Highmark has found inappropriate use of this code pair.

Exposure and exploration of the surgical field is integral to an operative procedure and is not separately reportable. Code 69440 is not eligible for separate reimbursement when reported on the same date during the same operative session on the same ear as another procedure, such as code 69436. According to the NCCI Policy Manual, Chapter 8, If an otologic procedure requires a transcanal or endaural approach with incision of the tympanic membrane and access through the middle ear, exploration of the middle ear (CPT code 69440) and tympanic membrane procedures (e.g., CPT codes 69420, 96421, 69424, 69433, 69436, 69610, 69620) should not be reported separately.

It is important to note that NCCI does not include all possible combinations of correct coding edits or types of unbundling that exist. Providers are required to code correctly even if edits do not exist to prevent using an inappropriate code combination.