Colonoscopy Billing Reminder- Preventive vs. Diagnostic

The Affordable Care Act (ACA or health care reform law) requires nongrandfathered health plans to cover outlined preventive care and screenings without member cost sharing, when the services are rendered by an in-network provider and/or facility. Colorectal cancer screenings are included as a covered preventive care service under these guidelines.

Since colonoscopies are rendered for both screening and diagnostic purposes, it is very important for providers to use appropriate ICD-9 diagnosis coding guidelines when reporting colonoscopies. When inappropriate ICD-9 diagnosis codes are submitted on claims, it can result in incorrect provider payment and/or incorrect member cost sharing.

To reduce claim adjustments and your corresponding refunds to members, we recommend the following approach when coding a colonoscopy claim.

- In a situation where an individual presents for treatment solely for the purpose of a screening exam, without any signs of symptoms of a disease, then such a procedure should be considered a screening. The appropriate use of diagnosis codes and screening procedure codes is valuable in promoting appropriate adjudication of the claim.

- In a circumstance where an individual presents for a screening exam (without sign or symptoms), and an issue is encountered during that preventive exam, then such a circumstance would warrant the use of the PT modifier. The procedure and diagnosis codes that would typically be used in such an instance may not clearly demonstrate that the service began as a screening procedure but had to be converted to a diagnostic procedure due to a pathologic finding (e.g. polyp, tumor, bleeding) encountered during that preventive exam.

- In the instance that an individual presents for treatment due to sign or symptoms to rule out or confirm a suspected diagnosis, such an encounter should be considered a diagnostic exam, not a screening exam. In such a situation, the modifier PT should not be used and the sign or symptom should be used to explain the reason for the test.