

Integrative Medicine for Healthcare Organizations • January 22-24, 2004 • San Diego • California
Sponsored by Health Forum and InnoVision Communications

Session Title: Delivering Integrative Healthcare Under Consumer-Driven Health Plans:
An ABC Coding Case Study

Length: 60 minutes

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Objectives: Attendees will learn...

1. why ABC codes for alternative medicine, nursing and integrative healthcare are essential to profitably delivering the kind of care today's self-directed consumers demand;
2. how to implement ABC codes to fill gaps in the HIPAA code sets and measurably improve business performance; and
3. what competitive advantages can be built by using ABC codes in research, management and commerce applications.

Background: Lovelace Sandia Health System (now part of Ardent Health Services) has been using ABC codes in integrative healthcare claims adjudication for several years, in cooperation with Bridges in Medicine, an integrative healthcare provider organization in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

This session focuses on lessons from their groundbreaking work in integrative healthcare, as well as on the strategic implications of ABC codes and how to implement them to increase the ROI from a variety of consumer-oriented initiatives.

The session addresses

- 1) how gaps in the HIPAA code sets increase health system inefficiencies and mislead health policy decision makers;
- 2) why these gaps prevent cost-effective research, management and commerce for the integrative healthcare increasingly demanded by today's consumers;
- 3) how the combination of ABC codes and the "grandfathered" HIPAA code sets (e.g., CPT and HCPCS Level II) supports better health insurance benefit plan design, managed care and provider contracting, utilization and clinical practice management, claims processing, outcomes research and actuarial analyses;
- 4) why the combination of code sets has already begun to improve individual and public health, business and industry efficiencies and socioeconomic development; and
- 5) what this means to the bottom line performance of today's consumer-oriented healthcare organizations.

ABC codes reflect alternative medicine, nursing and other integrative healthcare practices. They improve healthcare research, management and commerce by filling gaps in the national health information infrastructure (NHII) and older HIPAA code sets, thereby ensuring all care--not just that of conventional allopathic physicians or dentists--is supported by complete, accurate and precise coding.

ABC codes are used in conjunction with older HIPAA code sets (such as CPT and HCPCS II codes) and fit in existing claim forms, data fields, software applications, information systems and business processes.

Anyone can use ABC codes for research, management and manual commerce applications.

For electronic commerce, ABC codes are HIPAA-compliant when used 1) by entities that formally registered to secure their rights to code set use under HIPAA and 2) by contractual trading partners of those registrants.

HHS Secretary Tommy Thompson authorized use of ABC codes under HIPAA under 45 CFR 162.940 in January 2003. This section of the code of federal regulations allows for industry use of proposed modifications to the HIPAA standards while those modifications are being evaluated by HHS (in this case, to assess the cost-benefit of ABC codes in HIPAA transactions when used in conjunction with CPT and HCPCS II codes).

In addition to Ardent Lovelace Sandia and Bridges in Medicine, more than 10,000 entities registered for rights to use ABC codes in HIPAA transactions. Through them, millions of their trading partners also have access to the new code set. Today, more than a dozen Medicaid agencies, top commercial and specialty health plans, leading integrative delivery networks, Fortune 100 healthcare information technology companies, and tier one medical schools are positioned to implement the codes in research, management and commerce applications, including HIPAA transactions.

Legislative support for ABC codes is significant. For example, the codes were described in National Foundation for Women Legislators' "Access to Care" resolution, as an essential component of the national health information infrastructure (NHII).

These legislators and many of the industry's foremost thought and practice leaders understand ABC codes reduce the potential for fraudulent billing, give parity to integrative healthcare practitioners and support comparisons of the economic and health outcomes of conventional, complementary and alternative care, to identify best practices.

The systematic identification of the most cost-effective approaches to care is likely to lead to better coverage and reimbursement decisions that enable the greatest number of Americans to get the right care in the right place and time, at a rational cost.