



ADVISORY GUIDE

E/M Documentation Best Practices

A practical guide to documentation alignment, coding accuracy, and audit readiness.

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EXECUTIVE INTRODUCTION

Why E/M Documentation Matters

Evaluation and Management coding is one of the highest-volume and highest-risk areas in healthcare revenue cycle operations. The accuracy of E/M coding depends almost entirely on the quality and structure of provider documentation.

When documentation is clear and aligned with E/M guidelines, accurate coding follows. When it is not, the result is inconsistent leveling, audit exposure, and revenue leakage that compounds across thousands of encounters.

The core challenge:

Most E/M documentation issues are not intentional. They reflect a gap between how providers naturally document encounters and what E/M guidelines require to support the appropriate level of service.

COMMON ISSUES

Where E/M Documentation Breaks Down

The Most Frequent Documentation Gaps

- 1 Inconsistent documentation of Medical Decision Making (MDM) elements across providers.
- 2 Problem complexity that is present in the encounter but not clearly captured in the record.
- 3 Data reviewed and ordered that is not documented in a way that supports the coded level.
- 4 Templated documentation that creates the appearance of completeness without supporting the E/M level.
- 5 Lack of a shared framework between providers and coding staff for what 'complete' documentation looks like.

Why this matters:

Each of these gaps creates a point of variability in the coding process. Variability at scale becomes a compliance and revenue integrity risk.

BEST PRACTICES

Building Documentation That Supports Accurate Coding

Five Practices That Improve E/M Documentation Quality

- 1 Establish a shared understanding of MDM components between providers and coding staff.
- 2 Review documentation templates to ensure they capture — not obscure — the complexity of the encounter.
- 3 Create a feedback loop that connects coding findings directly back to documentation practices.
- 4 Involve operational and revenue cycle leadership in documentation alignment, not just compliance teams.
- 5 Treat documentation education as an ongoing operational process, not a one-time training event.

CLOSING PERSPECTIVE

Documentation Alignment Is a Revenue Strategy

Organizations that invest in E/M documentation alignment see measurable improvement across coding accuracy, denial rates, and audit performance. The investment is in the documentation environment — and the returns are felt throughout the revenue cycle.

Accurate E/M coding begins with documentation that is structured to support it.

Schave Health Advisory works with healthcare organizations to strengthen coding quality, documentation alignment, audit readiness, and operational performance.

To schedule a conversation: schavehealthadvisory.com