Coding Symptoms, Signs, and Abnormal Findings

Chapter 18 of the Tabular List of ICD-10-CM includes symptoms, signs, abnormal results of investigations, and other ill-defined conditions. Codes range from R00 to R99. You assign codes from this chapter when you encounter the following:

- No specific diagnosis can be made after investigation
- Signs and symptoms existing at the time of the initial encounter prove to be transient or a cause cannot be determined
- A case is referred elsewhere before a definitive diagnosis is made
- A patient fails to return and you have only a provisional diagnosis

**Example**

*Diagnosis: Right lower quadrant abdominal tenderness*

*Code: R10.813*

**Notes**

A *symptom* is a subjective observation reported by the patient, but not confirmed objectively by the physician. For example, a patient reports that their forearm itches and has a burning sensation. Itching and burning are considered symptoms.

A *sign* is defined as an objective evidence of disease that can be observed by the physician. For example, the physician observes a rash in the forearm of the patient who reported.
The following are some guidelines that you need to remember when coding symptoms and signs:

- Codes for signs or symptoms may be reported in addition to a related definitive diagnosis when the symptom is NOT routinely associated with that diagnosis. The definitive diagnosis should be sequenced before the symptom code.

- Signs and symptoms that are normally associated with a disease process should not be assigned as an additional code unless instructed by the notes included with the disease code.

- If a combination code identifies both the diagnosis and its common symptoms, then an additional code is not required for the symptom.

Do not report codes from Chapter 18 if the definitive diagnosis is available. For example, if the diagnosis is right lower quadrant abdominal pain due to acute appendicitis, you need not assign the code R10.31 for the pain. Instead, assign the code K35.80 for acute appendicitis.

Use a disease reference book if you are not familiar with disease symptoms.

One way to find abnormal findings in the Alphabetic Index is to look up the main term "Abnormal," and subterm by specific test.