

## INITIAL VS. SUBSEQUENT DIAGNOSING FOR FRACTURES

Most people would presume *initial encounter* means the very first visit, where a patient sees a physician for the first time about a new issue. Therefore, *subsequent visits* would be any visit thereafter, correct? The simple answer is no—especially when it comes to fracture coding for US Family Health Plan members.

Coding for fractures can be confusing and often leads to errors in reporting the correct diagnosis. Although *initial* and *subsequent* were used with fracture coding in ICD-9, they are interpreted differently in ICD-10.

**ICD-10 defines initial encounters** as those “that occur while the patient is receiving active treatment.” Active treatment includes surgical treatment, emergency department encounter, and evaluation and continuing (ongoing) treatment by the same or a different physician.

**ICD-10 defines subsequent encounters** as those “that occur after the patient has completed active treatment of the fracture and is receiving routine care for the fracture during the healing or recovery phase.”

So, for example, these are initial encounters:

- ✦ Patient John Doe presents with hand pain, and X-rays reveal a hand fracture. The physician feels the fracture may heal routinely without surgical repair. The physician gives John Doe a brace and instructs him to follow up in a week. This is coded as an Initial Visit.



- ✦ The next week, John Doe returns and gets another X-ray. Because healing is not routine, the same physician decides that surgery is needed. The decision for surgery is considered active care, and the visit is still coded as an Initial Visit.

This is a subsequent encounter:

- ✦ John Doe had surgery with the original diagnosing physician. A month later, the patient is supposed to follow up, but the physician is out of town. John Doe follows up with a different physician, who takes new X-rays to check the healing post-op. No recommendations are made other than to follow the original plan of care. As this is aftercare for the fracture, this is considered a Subsequent Visit.