CONDITIONS OF THE AORTA DIAGNOSIS CODING

Diagnosis Coding - Conditions of the Aorta

The two most common problems that affect the aorta are aneurysms and dissections. An aneurysm is defined as a localized, pathological, blood-filled dilatation of a blood vessel caused by disease or weakening of the vessel’s walls.\(^1\) If there’s a permanent dilation of 4cm in diameter, it’s considered an aneurysm; anything less may be described as bulging, ballooning or dilation.\(^2\) Aneurysms may be congenital, or they may occur where there has been previous damage to an artery. Aneurysms are described according to location, size and shape. Shapes include fusiform and saccular. Fusiform is when the aneurysm is enlarged equally in all directions. Saccular is when the bulge or sac occurs on only one side of the aorta.\(^2\)

**Potential locations for an aortic aneurysm:**

- Ascending (441.2); if ruptured, code 441.1
- Arch (441.2); if ruptured, code 441.1
- Thoracic descending (441.2); if ruptured, code 441.1
- Abdominal descending (441.4); if ruptured, code 441.3
- Abdominal (441.4); if ruptured, code 441.3
- Thoracoabdominal (441.7); if ruptured, code 441.6
- Descending NOS (441.9); if ruptured, code 441.5
- Abdominal descending (441.4); if ruptured, code 441.3

Dissecting aneurysms occur when a tear begins within the wall of the aorta, causing the three layers to separate. The dissection causes the wall of the aorta to weaken, and the aorta enlarges. Dissections may occur any place along the aorta and treatment depends upon the location. Frequently, those involving the ascending aorta are treated with emergency surgery, while those involving the descending thoracic aorta are treated with medication. Although dissections are uncommon, they are the most common of the acute aortic syndromes. The implementation of the 5\(^{th}\) digit in coding permits the reporting of thoracoabdominal aneurysms using one code instead of two.\(^3,4\) Dissections are lethal if left untreated.\(^5\)

**Dissection of aorta coding:**

- Unspecified site (441.00)
- Thoracic (441.01)
- Abdominal (441.02)
- Thoracoabdominal (441.03)

These conditions do not disappear of their own accord; they must be bypassed or surgically removed. Once the aneurysm has been repaired or removed, it’s no longer coded as active. A V-code is assigned - V12.50.

**References:**

*The Free Dictionary - Online
**For The Record Magazine - July 18, 2011, Coding for Aortic Conditions
***AHA Coding Clinic for ICD-9-CM, 1989, fourth quarter, page 10
****Aortic Aneurysm Dissecting - Coding Clinic, 4\(^{th}\) Quarter 1994, p.41