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## THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

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# Walked Into a Lamppost? Hurt While Crocheting? Help Is on the Way

*New Medical-Billing System Provides Precision; Nine Codes for Macaw Mishaps*

By ANNA WILDE MATHEWS

Today, hospitals and doctors use a system of about 18,000 codes to describe medical services in bills they send to insurers. Apparently, that doesn't allow for quite enough nuance.

### A Code for What Ails You

[Search for diagnoses codes](#) from the International Classification of Diseases, 10th Revision, by typing in a keyword. We've provided a few to get you started.

**Suggested Searches** | Click on the a below, or enter a term in the search field.

Things that Struck Bite by... Turtles Chickens Macaws Opera Lamp- M houses poste h

Search for "Bitten":

code	description
W521XX	Bitten by insect, initial encounter
W521XX	Bitten by insect, subsequent encounter
W521XX	Bitten by insect, sequela
W521XX	Bitten by rat, initial encounter
W521XX	Bitten by rat, subsequent encounter
W521XX	Bitten by cat, initial encounter
W521XX	Bitten by cat, subsequent encounter
W521XX	Bitten by dog, initial encounter
W521XX	Bitten by dog, subsequent encounter

And see the full table of codes at the [Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services site](#). Click 2011 Code Descriptions -- Long Format, Table Format and README files.



Health insurers, doctors and hospitals are bracing for chaos as they prepare to adopt a new federally mandated format for medical billing. Anna Wilde Mathews has details on Lunch Break.

A new federally mandated version will expand the number to around 140,000—adding codes that describe precisely what bone was broken, or which artery is receiving a stent.

It will also have a code for recording that a patient's injury occurred in a chicken coop. ([See code.](#))

Indeed, health plans may never again wonder where a patient got hurt. There are codes for injuries in opera houses ([see code](#)), art galleries ([see code](#)), squash courts ([see code](#)) and nine locations in and around a mobile home ([see codes](#)), from the bathroom to the bedroom.

Some doctors aren't sure they need quite that much detail. "Really? Bathroom versus bedroom?" says Brian Bachelder, a family physician in Akron, Ohio. "What difference does it make?"

The federal agencies that developed the system—generally known as ICD-10, for International Classification of Diseases, 10th Revision—say the codes will provide a more exact and up-to-date accounting of diagnoses and hospital inpatient procedures, which could improve payment strategies and care guidelines. "It's for accuracy of data and quality of care," says Pat Brooks, senior technical adviser at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

Billing experts who translate doctors' work into codes are gearing up to start using the new system in two years. They say the new detail is welcome in many cases. But a few aspects are also causing some head scratching.



Agence France-Presse/Getty Images

W61.11XA: A code for injuries related to macaws.

Some codes could seem downright insulting: R46.1 is "bizarre personal appearance ([see code](#))," while R46.0 is "very low level of personal hygiene ([see code](#))."

It's not clear how many klutzes want to notify their insurers that a doctor visit was a W22.02XA, "walked into lamppost, initial encounter" (or, for that matter, a W22.02XD, "walked into lamppost, subsequent encounter").

Why are there codes for injuries received while sewing, ironing, playing a brass instrument, crocheting, doing handicrafts, or knitting—but not while shopping, wonders

Rhonda Buckholtz, who does ICD-10 training for the American Academy of Professional Coders, a credentialing organization.

Code V91.07XA, which involves a "burn due to water-skis on fire ([see codes](#))," is another mystery she ponders: "Is it work-related?" she asks. "Is it a trick skier jumping through hoops of fire? How does it happen?"

Much of the new system is based on a World Health Organization code set in use in many countries for more than a decade. Still, the American version, developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, is considerably more fine-grained.



Agence France-Presse/Getty Images

Y93.J4: A code for injuries received while playing brass instruments.

The WHO, for instance, didn't see the need for 72 codes about injuries tied to birds. But American doctors whose patients run afoul of a duck ([see codes](#)), macaw ([see codes](#)), parrot ([see codes](#)), goose ([see codes](#)), turkey ([see codes](#)) or chicken ([see codes](#)) will be able to select from nine codes for each animal, notes George Alex, an official at the Advisory Board Co., a health-care research firm.

There are 312 animal codes in all, he says, compared to nine in the international version. There are separate codes for "bitten by turtle" and "struck by turtle." ([See codes.](#))

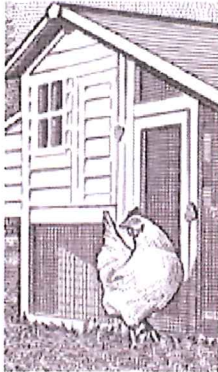
U.S. hospitals and insurers are bracing for possible hiccups when the move to ICD-10 happens on Oct. 1, 2013, even though they've known it was coming since early 2009.

"You have millions of transactions flowing in the health-care system and this is an opportunity to mess them all up," says Jeremy Delinsky, chief technology officer for athenahealth Inc., which provides billing services to doctors.

Medicare officials say they believe many big insurers and hospital systems are making preparations, but there may be some issues with smaller ones that won't be ready.



With the move to ICD-10, the one code for suturing an artery will become 195 codes, designating every single artery, among other variables, according to OptumInsight, a unit of UnitedHealth Group Inc. A single code for a badly healed fracture could now translate to 2,595 different codes, the firm calculates. Each signals information including what bone was broken, as well as which side of the body it was on.



Some companies hope to grab business from the shift. One medical-coding website operator, Find A Code LLC, has created a series of YouTube videos with the tagline, "Yeah, there's a code for that." Snow White biting the poisoned apple, the firm says, may be a case of T78.04, "anaphylactic shock due to fruits and vegetables ([see codes](#))." On April 1, the company posted a document with the secret "X-codes" to describe medical conditions stemming from encounters with aliens.

Other coding cognoscenti spot possible hidden messages in the real codes. The abbreviation some use for the new system itself, I10, is also a code for high blood pressure. Several codes involving drainage devices end in "ooZ." Then there are two of the codes describing sex-change operations that end in NoK1 and MoJo. "You could see it ripple through the room as people said, 'nookie and mojo!'" says Kathryn DeVault, who has been teaching ICD-10 classes for the American Health Information Management Association. "Was it purposeful? We don't know."



Agence France-Presse/Getty Images

Code V91.07XA: A code for a 'burn due to water-skis on fire.'

No, it wasn't, says the Medicare agency's Ms. Brooks, who says the codes are built according to a consistent pattern in which each digit has a meaning.

"I couldn't if I wanted to insert a cute message," says Ms. Brooks, who admits that she could be described by Z73.1, "Type A behavior pattern ([see code](#))."

Medicare and CDC officials say codes were selected based on years of input from medical experts in various fields. Codes describing the circumstances of injuries are important for public-health researchers to track how people get hurt and try to prevent injuries, they say.

Being able to tabulate risks tied to locations such as chicken coops could be "important as far as surveillance activities" for public health research, says Donna Pickett, a medical systems administrator at the CDC. She says the current code for a badly healed fracture is so vague it isn't useful.

Another CMS official, Denise M. Buenning, compares ICD-10 to a phone book. "All the numbers are in there," she says. "Are you going to call all of the numbers? No. But the numbers you need are in there."

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A Code for What Ails You

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See article: Walked Into a Lamppost? Hurt While Crocheting? Help Is on the Way  
([http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424053111904103404576560742746021106.html?mod=WSJ\\_hpp\\_MIDDLE\\_Video\\_Top](http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424053111904103404576560742746021106.html?mod=WSJ_hpp_MIDDLE_Video_Top))

Source: Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (<http://www.cms.gov/icd10/>)

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Bitten Searching for "Bitten" (Showing 1 - 50 of 96 records found)

<< first < prev 1 2 (#) next > (#) last >> (#)

code (yii-dt0-href-code)	description (yii-dt0-href-description)
W5301XA	Bitten by mouse, initial encounter
W5301XD	Bitten by mouse, subsequent encounter
W5301XS	Bitten by mouse, sequela
W5311XA	Bitten by rat, initial encounter
W5311XD	Bitten by rat, subsequent encounter
W5311XS	Bitten by rat, sequela
W5321XA	Bitten by squirrel, initial encounter
W5321XD	Bitten by squirrel, subsequent encounter
W5321XS	Bitten by squirrel, sequela
W5381XA	Bitten by other rodent, initial encounter
W5381XD	Bitten by other rodent, subsequent encounter
W5381XS	Bitten by other rodent, sequela
W540XXA	Bitten by dog, initial encounter
W540XXD	Bitten by dog, subsequent encounter
W540XXS	Bitten by dog, sequela
W5501XA	Bitten by cat, initial encounter
W5501XD	Bitten by cat, subsequent encounter
W5501XS	Bitten by cat, sequela
W5511XA	Bitten by horse, initial encounter
W5511XD	Bitten by horse, subsequent encounter
W5511XS	Bitten by horse, sequela
W5521XA	Bitten by cow, initial encounter

code (yui-dt0-href-code)	description (yui-dt0-href-description)
W5521XD	Bitten by cow, subsequent encounter
W5521XS	Bitten by cow, sequela
W5531XA	Bitten by other hoof stock, initial encounter
W5531XD	Bitten by other hoof stock, subsequent encounter
W5531XS	Bitten by other hoof stock, sequela
W5541XA	Bitten by pig, initial encounter
W5541XD	Bitten by pig, subsequent encounter
W5541XS	Bitten by pig, sequela
W5551XA	Bitten by raccoon, initial encounter
W5551XD	Bitten by raccoon, subsequent encounter
W5551XS	Bitten by raccoon, sequela
W5581XA	Bitten by other mammals, initial encounter
W5581XD	Bitten by other mammals, subsequent encounter
W5581XS	Bitten by other mammals, sequela
W5601XA	Bitten by dolphin, initial encounter
W5601XD	Bitten by dolphin, subsequent encounter
W5601XS	Bitten by dolphin, sequela
W5611XA	Bitten by sea lion, initial encounter
W5611XD	Bitten by sea lion, subsequent encounter
W5611XS	Bitten by sea lion, sequela
W5621XA	Bitten by orca, initial encounter
W5621XD	Bitten by orca, subsequent encounter
W5621XS	Bitten by orca, sequela
W5631XA	Bitten by other marine mammals, initial encounter
W5631XD	Bitten by other marine mammals, subsequent encounter
W5631XS	Bitten by other marine mammals, sequela
W5641XA	Bitten by shark, initial encounter
W5641XD	Bitten by shark, subsequent encounter

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