

## **There's a Code For That!**

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The International Classification of Disease (ICD) system is used by almost all healthcare providers and insurers in the U.S. Its use is mandatory for Medicare reimbursement and became a universal means for billing private insurers in 2003.<sup>1</sup> Development of the ICD system started in the nineteenth century, and the World Health Organization assumed responsibility for it with its sixth revision in 1948. While previous versions had only provided codes for causes of death, ICD-6 expanded the scope to cover non-fatal diseases. ICD codes are updated annually and have been implemented by almost all WHO member states for use in tracking diseases, reimbursement, health administration, and research.<sup>2</sup> According to the WHO, over 1.6 million clinical conditions are now coded.<sup>3</sup>

As a result, there is now an ICD code for almost everything, including some fairly bizarre conditions such as:

- Bitten by a turtle, bitten by a sea lion, or struck by a macaw
- Burn due to water skis set on fire
- Hurt at the library or hurt at the opera
- Hurt due to walking into a lamppost or colliding with a roller-skater
- Bizarre personal appearance
- Problems in relationship with in-laws<sup>4</sup>

All of these "conditions" are considered forms of illness and injury for which your insurer can be billed.

Perhaps the most disturbing codes were announced by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS) in April 2022. ICD codes Z28.310, Z28.311 and Z28.39 were added to be used for reporting COVID-19 vaccine status.<sup>5</sup> Z28.3 had already been in use to indicate "under-immunization status."<sup>6</sup> This allows doctors and insurers to know whether or not your children are fully vaccinated, for example. But these new codes are specific for COVID-19 vaccines. The addition of these new codes may be one of the reasons why more people are reporting that their doctors are asking them about their COVID-19 vaccine status during even routine visits.

After just a cursory scan of the list of codes, I am glad I've stayed out of the medical system for the last few decades. I imagine that medical "frequent fliers" have been coded with all kinds of conditions, including forms of mental illness. In fact, according to the CMS website, "ICD-10 also includes significant improvements over ICD-9 in coding primary care encounters, external causes of injury, mental disorders, and preventive health. The ICD-10 code sets' breadth and granularity reflect advances in medicine and medical technology, as well as capture added detail on socioeconomics, ambulatory care conditions, problems related to lifestyle, and the results of screening

tests.”<sup>7</sup> The English translation – your insurance carrier, which for tens of millions of people is the government – knows a lot about you. And it wants to know more.

My advice in response to this:

- Seek medical attention only when necessary – focus on building your health!
- Seek care outside of the reimbursement system if you are able. An increasing number of docs are going into private practice and leaving the reimbursement system. You might be surprised at how affordable healthcare can be when offered outside of conventional institutions.
- If you must see a health professional within the healthcare system, disclose only what is necessary in order to receive the treatment you need.

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<sup>1</sup> Edmund S. Cibas MD, in Cytology 2021. International Classification of Diseases (ICD)-10 CM Codes. *Science Direct* <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/medicine-and-dentistry/international-classification-of-diseases>

<sup>2</sup> Robert Jakob, in International Encyclopedia of Public Health (Second Edition) 2017. *Science Direct* <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/medicine-and-dentistry/international-classification-of-diseases>

<sup>3</sup> World Health Organization. WHO’s new International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) comes into effect. Feb 11 2022 [https://www.who.int/news/item/11-02-2022-who-s-new-international-classification-of-diseases-\(icd-11\)-comes-into-effect](https://www.who.int/news/item/11-02-2022-who-s-new-international-classification-of-diseases-(icd-11)-comes-into-effect)

<sup>4</sup> <https://blog.curemd.com/the-most-bizarre-icd-10-codes-infographic/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cms.gov/medicare/icd-10/2022-icd-10-cm>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.icd10data.com/ICD10CM/Codes/Z00-Z99/Z20-Z29/Z28-/Z28.3>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.cms.gov/Medicare/Coverage/CoverageGenInfo/ICD10>