Major Depressive Disorder
A Quick Reference Guide for Providers

According to The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), the criterion for major depressive disorder (MDD) includes five or more of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) symptoms present during the same two-week period. They represent a change from previous functioning, with at least one of the symptoms being either "depressed mood" or "loss of interest or pleasure." The following may be used as a reference guide for MDD documentation and coding. **Note: do not document MDD as "depression (unspecified)."**

Best Practice for MDD

- **Define it** – Documentation must include the term "major" to represent the illness (not the symptom)
- **Describe it** – Documentation should indicate either single or recurrent episode
- **Stage it** – Documentation should indicate severity (mild, moderate, severe with/without psychotic features, or remission status)

Single or Recurrent

- A first-time diagnosis of MDD is considered a single episode
- If a patient is diagnosed with a new MDD episode after a prior remission of at least two months, the subsequent diagnosis becomes recurrent

Clinical Status

- The patient may or may not be currently treated for depression (counseling and/or medication)
- Defined as a level of depressive symptoms indistinguishable from that of someone who has never been depressed
    - This low level of signs and symptoms is traditionally used as a guide to measure remission

Remission

- **Partial Remission** – Symptoms of the immediately previous major depressive episode are present, but full criteria (five of nine criteria) are not met, or there is a period lasting less than two months without any significant symptoms of a major depressive episode
- **Full Remission** – During the past two months, less than five of the nine criteria of DSM-5-TR were present. This is regardless of treatment/medication status

MDD (single or recurrent) is clinically significant even when in remission; therefore, consider documenting as "major depressive disorder in partial remission" or "full remission." ICD 10-CM does not have a code for "history of" MDD.

MDD Documentation

- Symptoms or conditions reported or found on physical exam
- If there are currently no symptoms of depression, but the patient has a previous diagnosis, consider "MDD, in remission (single or recurrent)"
- Document validated screening tool and result

The wording of the diagnosis is critical; the term "major" must be explicitly documented by the clinician.

For questions or more information, please contact:

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