Postoperative Conditions

The term "postoperative" can be interpreted differently by clinicians and coders.

- Clinically the provider is referring to a timeframe that follows surgery without necessarily implying there is a relationship between the surgery and a particular condition.
- Coding conventions and other coding guidance may interpret "**postoperative**" as a ***complication*** of surgery.
  - Documentation of postoperative respiratory failure will result in the assignment of a complication code.
  - Updated coding guidelines for complications state, "it is not necessary for the provider to explicitly document the term 'complication.'"
- Some conditions that occur anytime following surgery during the same admission may be classified as a complication of care.
  - Patients who have elective surgery and later develop sepsis (POA = N) could be included in the population for PSI 13: Postoperative sepsis.

Providers should avoid using the term "postoperative" when describing a diagnosis unless the intent is to link the condition and the preceding procedure/surgery.

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