Z-Codes: What’s the Difference?

The purpose of this Tip for Coders is to clarify which Z-code is appropriate to assign in certain circumstances. It focuses on the following:

- **Z09** Follow-up examination after treatment for conditions other than malignant neoplasms versus a code from category **Z47** Other orthopaedic follow-up care or category **Z48** Other surgical follow-up care
- **Z41** Procedures for purposes other than remedying health state versus a code from category **Z42** Follow-up care involving plastic surgery

Z09 versus Z47 or Z48: Examination or care?

**Follow-up examination (Z09)**

- **Z09** Follow-up examination after treatment for conditions other than malignant neoplasms includes medical surveillance following treatment.
- It is assigned when the purpose of the visit is an examination to assess the status of a previously treated condition or injury (a personal history classifiable to categories Z85–Z88) to assess whether or not the previous treatment was successful and the outcome of the examination indicates there is no need for further treatment (i.e., the original condition is no longer present and has not recurred).
- The focus is to assess the status of the disease, condition or injury that was previously treated. Assessment may include, but is not limited to, a physical assessment, laboratory tests and diagnostic imaging.
- The key word, intent or reason for the encounter is follow-up examination (or investigation).

**Follow-up care (Z47 or Z48)**

- **Z47** Other orthopaedic follow-up care and **Z48** Other surgical follow-up care are assigned to indicate a reason for follow-up care.
- They are assigned when the purpose of the visit is for follow-up or prophylactic care, convalescent care or care to consolidate the treatment, to deal with residual states, or to prevent recurrence.
- The focus is to deal with residual states or to perform the final step of (or to consolidate) the treatment. Care may include, but is not limited to, removing stitches, screws or a cast; and changing a dressing, cast or drain.
- The key word, intent or reason for the encounter is follow-up care.
The following table provides examples of when to assign a code for follow-up examination versus follow-up care versus original condition/injury.

### Follow-up examination versus follow-up care versus original condition/injury

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of case</th>
<th>Follow-up examination, follow-up care or original condition/injury?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Patient falls and fractures shaft of radius and ulna. Cast is applied. Patient is discharged home. | Original condition  
This is a routine assessment following treatment of the fracture. It is an assessment of treatment status to determine whether the fracture is healing appropriately.  
This is not considered follow-up examination or follow-up care. Assign a code for the fracture, as the fracture has not healed and treatment continues. |
| Patient comes back to orthopedic clinic 4 weeks later for X-ray to assess status of healing. Fracture is healing. Cast will be left on for 2 more weeks. | Follow-up care  
This is a visit to deal with residual states. The fracture has healed. The purpose of this visit is to remove the cast.  
Assign Z47.8 Other specified orthopaedic follow-up care. |
| Patient comes back to orthopedic clinic 6 weeks later for cast removal. X-ray is done to assess status of healing. Fracture is healed. Cast is removed. | Follow-up care  
This is a visit to deal with residual states. The fracture has healed. The purpose of this visit is to remove the cast.  
Assign Z48.0 Attention to surgical dressings and sutures. |
| Patient has an acute myocardial infarction. Quadruple bypass surgery is performed. Patient is discharged home. | Follow-up examination  
This is a routine assessment following treatment (bypass surgery). It is an assessment of post-treatment status to determine whether the patient is healing appropriately. The patient has healed from the bypass surgery and has no signs or symptoms related to the previous myocardial infarction.  
Assign Z09.0 Follow-up examination after surgery for other conditions. |
| Patient comes back to heart clinic for staple removal. Patient is doing well. Appointment is made for reassessment in 6 months. | Follow-up care  
This is a visit to deal with residual states. The operative wound has healed. The purpose of this visit is to remove the staples.  
Assign Z48.0 Attention to surgical dressings and sutures. |
| Patient comes back to heart clinic and is seen by a cardiologist. Patient is doing well on current medications. Appointment is made for reassessment in 6 months. | Follow-up examination  
This is a routine assessment following treatment (bypass surgery). It is an assessment of post-treatment status to determine whether the patient is healing appropriately. The patient has healed from the bypass surgery and has no signs or symptoms related to the previous myocardial infarction.  
Assign Z09.0 Follow-up examination after surgery for other conditions. |
Assess your understanding — are the following cases follow-up examination, follow-up care or original condition/injury?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of case</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Patient cut her leg. Skin is not amenable to stitches. Dressing is applied. Patient is discharged. Patient comes back to clinic every 2 days for dressing change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Patient presents for cystoscopy for follow-up of bladder cancer that was previously treated by radiation therapy. There is no reoccurrence of the malignancy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Z41 versus Z42: Cosmetic and body-altering surgery versus follow-up plastic surgery?

**Cosmetic and body-altering surgery (Z41)**

- Assigned when the reason for admission is **cosmetic** or **body-altering surgery**.
- The surgery is not medically necessary to treat a condition or disease; it is requested by the patient because he or she wants to modify his or her physical appearance for esthetic purposes or personal preference.
- Examples include, but are not limited to, admission for face lift, hair transplant, breast augmentation and transgender reassignment.

**Follow-up plastic surgery (Z42)**

- Assigned when the reason for admission is plastic or reconstructive surgery to **repair disfigurement** due to a healed injury or previous operative site.
- The surgery is part of the overall treatment and care of the patient to deal with residual states of disfigurement due to an injury or surgical procedure.
- Examples include, but are not limited to, admission for reconstructive surgery for a healed burn and breast reconstruction surgery following a mastectomy for breast cancer.
The following table provides examples of **cosmetic** and **body-altering surgery** versus **follow-up plastic surgery**.

### Cosmetic and body-altering surgery versus follow-up plastic surgery

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of case</th>
<th>Cosmetic and body-altering surgery or follow-up plastic surgery?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Patient has an extensive excision of basal cell carcinoma of the nose. Patient is discharged home. | Follow-up plastic surgery  
This is follow-up care involving plastic surgery. The patient is having plastic surgery after the operative wound has healed in order to repair the disfigurement that was caused by the previous surgery.  
Assign Z42.0 Follow-up care involving plastic surgery of head and neck. |
| Patient has acne scar.                                                             | Cosmetic surgery  
This is plastic surgery for cosmetic or esthetic purposes. The surgery is not medically necessary. The patient is having the procedure because she wants to modify her physical appearance for esthetic purposes.  
Assign Z41.1 Other plastic surgery for unacceptable cosmetic appearance. |
| Patient lost over 100 pounds.                                                      | Cosmetic surgery  
This is plastic surgery for cosmetic or esthetic purposes. The surgery is not medically necessary. The patient is having the procedure because he wants to modify his appearance for esthetic purposes.  
Assign Z41.1 Other plastic surgery for unacceptable cosmetic appearance.  
**Note:** L98.7 Excessive and redundant skin and subcutaneous tissue is not the most responsible diagnosis/main problem. If assigned, it is an optional diagnosis type (3)/other problem. |

### Assess your understanding — are the following cases cosmetic and body-altering surgery or follow-up plastic surgery?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of case</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Patient presents for transgender reassignment surgery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Patient sustained a crush injury to his hand. His injury has healed. He now presents for reconstruction surgery of the phalanges of the hand using a pedicled transposition flap.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Tip for Coders
Answers: Follow-up examination, follow-up care or original condition/injury

1. **Follow-up care:** Z48.0 *Attention to surgical dressings and sutures*
   
   **Rationale:** The wound is assessed during the dressing change. However, the primary purpose of the visit is to change the dressing. The reason for the encounter is for follow-up care. Therefore, **Z48.0** is assigned.

2. **Original condition:** J18.9 *Pneumonia, unspecified*
   
   **Rationale:** The primary purpose of the visit is to assess the status of the pneumonia. The X-ray reveals no change in the patient’s status, and the patient continues to take antibiotics to treat the pneumonia. A code for the pneumonia is assigned. A code from Z09 *Follow-up examination after treatment for conditions other than malignant neoplasms* is **not** assigned.

3. **Follow-up examination:** Z08.1 *Follow-up examination after radiotherapy for malignant neoplasm*
   
   **Rationale:** The examination did not reveal a recurrence of the bladder cancer (i.e., the patient has a history of bladder cancer); therefore, a code for follow-up examination (Z08–Z09) is assigned.

Answers: Cosmetic and body-altering surgery versus follow-up plastic surgery

1. **Cosmetic and body-altering surgery:** Z41.80 *Procedures for transgender reassignment*
   
   **Rationale:** The primary purpose of the visit is that the patient is transgender and wants surgery to change his (currently feminine) appearance to match his gender. Transgender reassignment surgery is body-altering surgery to modify physical appearance and the patient’s anatomy to align with his or her gender. Therefore, **Z41.80** is assigned.

2. **Follow-up plastic surgery:** Z42.3 *Follow-up care involving plastic surgery of upper extremity*
   
   **Rationale:** The primary purpose of the visit is for plastic and reconstructive surgery following a healed injury. Therefore, **Z42.3** is assigned.

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## Appendix: Table of changes

The following table summarizes the changes to this tip and provides the rationale for each one.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of change</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Modified the wording in the second bullet under the heading “Follow-up examination (Z09).”</td>
<td>To align with the wording in the coding standard <em>Admission for Follow-up Examination.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modified the headings in the table “Follow-up examination versus follow-up care versus original condition/injury.”</td>
<td>To add a third category: “original condition/injury.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amended the code assignment for the first case in the table “Follow-up examination versus follow-up care versus original condition/injury.”</td>
<td>To demonstrate that this case is not considered follow-up examination or follow-up care because the fracture has not yet healed and treatment continues. This case is classified to the original condition (i.e., the fracture).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modified the wording in the rationale for the fourth case in the table “Follow-up examination versus follow-up care versus original condition/injury.”</td>
<td>To clarify why the case is considered follow-up examination and classified to Z09.0 <em>Follow-up examination after surgery for other conditions.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modified the headings in the section “Assess your understanding — are the following cases follow-up examination, follow-up care or original condition/injury?” and in the corresponding “Answers” section.</td>
<td>To add a third category: “original condition/injury.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Removed the case “Patient cut his foot. Wound is cleaned and dressing is applied . . .” from the section “Assess your understanding — are the following cases follow-up examination, follow-up care or original condition/injury?”</td>
<td>To remove a case for which there was no supporting clinical documentation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Added the case “Patient presents for cystoscopy for follow-up of bladder cancer that was previously treated by radiation therapy . . .” to the section “Assess your understanding — are the following cases follow-up examination, follow-up care or original condition/injury?”</td>
<td>To demonstrate a case classified to follow-up examination (Z08–Z09).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amended the code assignment for the case “Patient presents with fever and cough. X-ray confirms pneumonia . . .” in the section “Answers: Follow-up examination, follow-up care or original condition/injury.”</td>
<td>To demonstrate that this case is not considered follow-up examination or follow-up care because the X-ray revealed no change in the patient’s pneumonia and treatment continues. This case is classified to the original condition (i.e., the pneumonia).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>