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Physician Documentation - No Acute Distress

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To physicians, “No Acute Distress” means that your patient will probably not become unstable in the next 5 minutes. But to payors it means something completely different. In a recent audit, the reviewers concluded that when the emergency physician documented “no acute distress” the code assigned should be much lower than the service that was provided.

Documenting “no acute distress” in your general appearance section of your exam may seem appropriate and communicates to other physicians about the condition of your patient. However, reviewers looking for any reason to downcode your chart frequently jump on this term to justify a much lower service than what the physician provided. The term “NAD” is also facilitated by templated charts or computerized Macros that may actually prompt you to document NAD.

Under your General Appearance section, use this as an opportunity to describe your patient.

Examples

“Confused 85 year old male, nontoxic does not appear to be in pain.”

“Well hydrated 2 year old running around in the room with good social smile.”

Other terms to avoid...

▶ Normal cephalic	When was the last time you saw someone that was not?
▶ See nursing notes	No one really cares. Rather, document that you reviewed and agree with the nursing notes.
▶ See medication list	No one really cares. Rather, document that you reviewed the medication list.
▶ Noncontributory	Confusing term... what exactly is noncontributory?
▶ Negative	What was negative?

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Remember for those sites using Templated charts, please avoid checking the "NAD" box.

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