

How Should Transanal Endoscopic Surgery Be Coded for Successful Reimbursement?

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On behalf of the American Society of Colon and Rectal Surgeons Healthcare Economics Committee

QUESTION

What are people doing about coding for transanal minimally invasive surgery (TAMIS) CPT 0184T, which a lot of payors are not accepting anymore?

ANSWER

TAMIS and transanal endoscopic microscopic surgery (TEM) are often coded as 0184T—a temporary (T) Current Procedural Terminology (CPT) code that is also designated as a category III code. The code has no work relative value unit (wRVU) value. The code originally described TEM, but because the steps to perform TAMIS are similar to those of TEM, TAMIS is often coded as CPT 0184T. Some providers have chosen alternatives to coding TAMIS, such as “unlisted procedure, rectum” code CPT 45999 with a comparison to transanal excision codes 45171 (wRVU 8.13, not including the muscularis propria) or 45172 (wRVU 12.13, full thickness).

It should be noted that the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) has 0184T listed as “Transanal Endoscopic Surgery,” which would suggest that TAMIS is described by this code.¹ Many commercial insurers designate 0184T as the appropriate code for TAMIS and TEM^{2,3} but only cover the service for a limited number of indications. Some insurers will not cover the procedure at all despite it being a very advantageous means of removing early-stage cancers and advanced polyps from the rectum, allowing patients to avoid extensive resections and, at times, ostomies. These procedures have also been implemented to address small anastomotic leaks with suture repair, thereby avoiding the need for complex reoperative surgery. More recently, robotic approaches to TAMIS have also been demonstrated and studied.

A category III T code is created and meant to be used as a temporary code for emerging technology. Such codes allow the tracking of emerging procedures but do not have a RVU value.

T codes do not become Category II codes, which are used for performance measurement. The goal is to have a T code become a Category I code, which has an established description and RVU value. A “T” code must have Food and Drug Administration approval, meet appropriate clinical utilization thresholds, and be supported by high-quality evidence to become a Category I CPT code.⁴

The Transanal Endoscopic Surgery code 0184T was recently reviewed and did not meet acceptable clinical utilization thresholds, nor was it supported by robust, recent, high-quality evidence to allow for creation of a Category I code by the American Medical Association (AMA) CPT Committee. This procedure is not a “high-volume” procedure, with estimates indicating that fewer than 1000 claims are reimbursed annually between CMS and commercial payors. This number is likely to decline in the future, considering the increased utilization of endoscopic mucosal resection and endoscopic submucosal dissection. At the February 2023 AMA CPT meeting, an extension was requested for the category III T code 0184T to avoid deletion of the code. The code will be reviewed again after a 5-year period.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Work with the coding and billing team at your institution or practice to understand the best strategies for submitting a charge for TAMIS for billing and successful collections.
2. Have an appeal letter on file with reasons for choosing this approach and cite available evidence.
3. Understand how CMS and commercial payors expect this to be billed (this may be variable) and whether they reimburse this work. If a payor will not reimburse 0184T, consider exploring alternatives that accurately describe the work and might be reimbursed, such as 45999 with comparison code 45171 or 45172.
4. If you are employed, consider negotiating an RVU value for this code with your hospital system.

DISCLAIMER

Your question will be answered to the best of our availability using currently available legitimate resources. These include but are not limited to CPT codes,

Submit coding and billing questions to: dcr4codingcorner@gmail.com

Dis Colon Rectum 2026; 69: 158–159
DOI: 10.1097/DCR.0000000000004038
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International Classification of Diseases – Tenth Edition (ICD-10), CMS Healthcare Common Procedure Coding System, and Diagnosis-Related Groups, as well as common hospital billing practices. Although artificial intelligence may be queried to summarize recommendations, it will not be used as the sole resource for answering these questions. Please understand that in some instances, there may be varying opinions on the best answer to your question.

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COMMON RESOURCES

- CMS National Correct Coding Initiative Edits: <http://www.cms.gov/Medicare/Coding/NationalCorrectCodInitEd/index.html>
- AMA CPT: <https://www.ama-assn.org/practice-management/cpt>
- AMA Relative Value Scale Update Committee: <https://www.ama-assn.org/about/rvs-update-committee-ruc/rvs-update-committee-ruc>
- CMS Physician Fee Schedule: <https://www.cms.gov/medicare/payment/fee-schedules/physician>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ICD-10: <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/icd/icd10.htm#:~:text=The%20International%20Classification%20of%20>

Diseases,and%20presentation%20of%20mortality%20statistics.

- American College of Surgeons CPT Coding Bulletin Articles: <https://www.facs.org/for-medical-professionals/practice-management/coding-and-billing/cpt-coding-bulletin-articles/>
- American College of Surgeons Coding, Billing, and Payment Resources: <https://www.facs.org/for-medical-professionals/practice-management/coding-and-billing/>

REFERENCES

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