

Documenting diagnoses

The SOAP note and MEAT acronym are helpful tools

Two documentation tools can help ensure the complete capture of supporting documentation. They are the **subjective, objective assessment and plan or SOAP**, and the **monitor, evaluate, assess, treat or MEAT methods**.

SOAP

This note format is a common framework for documenting information in a medical record. Electronic medical record systems may not use the same SOAP categories, but they are generally organized in similar formats.

MEAT

This acronym is a helpful reminder to record all components of the visit relevant to the diagnosed condition to ensure complete documentation.

Following are examples of both tools in practice.

SOAP in practice: Atherosclerosis of the extremities

Subjective Chief complaint, history of present illness, medical history from the patient or guardian	• 50-year-old diabetic woman presents complaining of pain in legs that has worsened and now experiences severe pain at rest. Complains of cold legs and numbness in feet. • Current problems include hypertension, type 2 diabetes mellitus, peripheral artery disease with limb ischemia and intermittent claudication. • Metformin 500 mg orally twice a day for diabetes, tamsulosin 0.8 mg once a day
Objective Vitals, examination and other independent substantive information	• Blood pressure: 124/80, pulse: 60, height: 62 inches, weight: 125 pounds • Lab results: HgA1c: 7 • Heart: regular rate and rhythm, lungs clear; extremities: no palpable pedal pulse and no edema • Nerve conduction study: mild slowing; no change since 2021 • Computed tomography angiography report: Severe stenosis of right anterior tibial, posterior tibial and peroneal, and significant for calcified plaque. Bilateral popliteal and femoral with moderate stenosis
Assessment Diagnosis/status determined by clinical/medical decision-making based on record information	• Type 2 diabetes mellitus with associated PAD; diabetes is stable • Atherosclerosis of the extremities with rest pain – worsening
Plan Treatment or management plan detailing future actions	• Diabetes mellitus – continue metformin 500 mg twice a day • PAD – referral to vascular surgeon

The MEAT acronym in practice

Supporting elements		Documentation examples
Monitor	• Signs and symptoms • Condition status – stable, improving, worsening • Referencing reports, laboratory results and consultations	• Chronic deep vein thrombosis – edema, erythema • Major depressive disorder, single episode – patient reports increased insomnia
Evaluate	• Treatment response • Test results • Medication effectiveness	• Major depressive disorder, recurrent – patient not responding to medication • Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease – breathing has improved with inhaler
Assess/ Address	• Review and discussion of records • Counseling • Analysis and evaluation of pertinent information • Order tests	• Obesity – no weight loss, counsel patient/discuss preferred weight loss program • Type 2 diabetes mellitus/diabetic nephropathy –HbA1c, eGFR: 58
Treat	• Surgery and other therapies • Medications • Referral for treatment or consultation • Management plan, care coordination	• Type 2 diabetes mellitus – continue glimepiride 4 mg twice a day, Trulicity .75 mg/5 ml subcutaneous once a week • PAD with gangrene – referral for excisional debridement

Providers must confirm the accuracy of reported diagnoses and ensure that their practices comply with the ICD-10-CM Official Guidelines for Coding and Reporting and applicable legal requirements.



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